NEW WORLDS

COMPACT
SF

2/6

They should have known . . . they could not keep me bound forever

ROGER ZELAZNY's

LOVE IS AN IMAGINARY NUMBER



NEW WORLDS SF 158 COMPACT SF

NEW WORLDS SF

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THE NEW PRISM



IN THE LAST part of his serial, James Colvin seems to be suggesting what would be to many people the outrageous idea that science is replacing religion as the focus for mankind's hopes and fears.

At one time, superstition and then a sophisticated religion were about the only things that could offer an explanation of why things are as they are; nowadays, as our sciences become more sophisticated, we have an alternative explanation. Naturally many believe that science complements religion and they see no significance in the progress of man's scientific knowledge other than that we are learning better to interpret the works of God. Of course, to any religious person who is not a fundamentalist, God is an abstract ideal and to us this suggests that therefore any religious person not a fundamentalist is not religious in the strict sense. A good fundamentalist must for one thing believe that science is the Devil's instrument. In fact, once religion becomes sophisticated and leaves the realm of mere superstition, its intellectual followers, at least, must automatically become agnostics, particularly if they have elected to take a creed whose message is "Know Thyself".

We are inclined to believe that religion has served its function in civilisation; that it is a crutch that we shall soon be able to throw away. Religion was at one time the finest prism through which man could focus his hopes and fears. By means of this prism he was able to develop increasingly refined arts, sciences and ethical attitudes, all of which brought him eventually to the point where he found the prism itself not sufficiently fine enough for his use.

It appears that without a prism, we lose dynamism. Art

is too personal to supply a prism for the world to use; strong political creeds apparently refuse to allow sufficient range to the imagination (and in this respect mirror the unenlightened early Church). We are left, it seems, with science. Science is an excellent prism since it encompasses so many aspects—indeed virtually all the aspects —of the human condition. Physics answers questions concerning our environment; psychology answers questions concerning our behaviour as individuals; sociology answers questions concerning our behaviour as a race. We even have a science which strives to understand the essential nature of things: ontology. A true religion offers permanent consolations but a true science offers permanent remedies, and therefore, we feel, it is a step forward in our progress towards understanding ourselves and our environment when we relinquish the old benefits of religion for the new benefits of science. The symbol of the ambivalent Bomb shadows the symbol of the crucifix nowadays but the Atom Cloud offers salvation as well as retribution and is therefore a more potent symbol for our times than the crucifix. The only conflict between these symbols is between the old and the new, not between the good and the bad. Christ died for them. The people of Hiroshima died for us.

The Atom Cloud causes us to reconsider our motives and our ambitions. We ask: Why is it there?

We were once exhorted to learn to *know* God, to understand Him; and we were told that we should find this understanding within ourselves, and that once we found it we should not fear God, but love Him. We saw the crucifix and asked: "Why is it there?"

Whereas we have every cause to be disturbed by one of the things the Bomb symbolises—the destructive aspects of scientific knowledge—a negative fear of science can only aggravate and encourage the result we fear. Through our arts, through our philosophy, we can learn to understand science; through our understanding of science we can understand ourselves, our fundamental fears and hopes as human beings. We can understand more clearly why we express ourselves by creating or turning to works of art, science and philosophy.

In sf, for nearly two-thirds of a century we have despaired. We have produced a literature of despair. We have produced a literature that might, in itself, be vital, but which has reflected that despair in works of an apparently cynical or hopeless nature and where we have supplied answers they have been confused.

This was natural in a century that has produced world wars, insane political creeds, H-Bombs; but the time has come when we are beginning to stop worrying about it and starting to worry what we're going to do about it.

The sciences, as we've said, offer remedies. These remedies cannot be accepted without question (the 19th century made that mistake) and nowadays a good scientist in any field will never offer a positive remedy, only a possible one. We were too quick to relinquish trust in God for trust in science or politics. Faith, apparently, is not enough, unless it is faith in oneself and faith in the personal creation of a work of art or philosophy. But the information keeps coming in. It is up to us to sift it and give it form and direction in art and politics.

There is an increasing atmosphere of positive and hopeful thinking in the world of art (and even in the political sphere). Young artists, in particular, seem to be fed-up with simply expressing how fed-up they are. They accept, like scientists and politicians, that things are bad, but they're trying to work out how things can be made better.

Coupled with this is the improvement in standards of popular art as the general standard of education improves (television often seems as much responsible for this as the schools). With luck, we should soon be experiencing a climate similar to the climate in England at the time of the Renaissance when there was little divergence between vital art that was good and vital art that was popular.

For a long time, the fusion between good literature and popular escapist fiction has been approached in the best science fiction. As the climate improves and our general attitude towards science becomes more rational, perhaps we shall see sf creating not just a fusion between "serious" and "popular" entertainment, but coming into its own

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THE WRECKS OF TIME

by James Colvin

Conclusion

thirteen

The Petrified Place

MAGGY WHITE GLOWERED at Steifflomeis who seemed very full of himself at that moment.

"What do you think you're doing?" she said harshly. "This goes against—"

"I don't care," Steifflomeis shrugged. "If Faustaff could get away with so much, then so can I—we, if you like." He turned a light-hearted eye on Faustaff who had still not completely recovered from the shock of transition between E-3 and E-Zero.

"Well, professor," Faustaff heard Steifflomeis say. "Are you impressed?"

"I'm curious," said Faustaff slowly.

Orelli began to chuckle and moved towards Faustaff, but was stopped short by Ogg's now somewhat nervous gun nudging at him. Ogg's expression had become resolute, but he seemed baffled. Nancy looked rather the same.

Orelli said sharply: "Gordon! Put the gun away. That was a silly gesture. We are in the position of power now, no matter how many guns you point at us. You realise that? You must!"

Faustaff pulled himself together. "What if we order you to return us to E-3? We could kill you if you refused."

"I am not so sure you would kill us, professor," Steifflomeis smiled. "And in any case it takes hours to prepare for a transition. We would need technical help too. All our people are at the cathedral." He pointed out of the window to where a spire could be seen over the tops of roofs and trees. The spire seemed unnaturally solid in the peculiarly unreal setting. Part of the impression was gained, Faustaff realised, by the fact that the whole landscape, aside from the spire looked unused. "Also," Steifflo-

meis continued, "they are expecting us and will come here soon if we do not turn up there."

"We still have you," Ogg reminded him. "We can barter your lives for a safe transport back to where we came from."

"You could," Steifflomeis admitted. "But what would that gain you? Isn't E-zero where you wanted to come?" He glanced at Faustaff. "That's true isn't it, professor?"

Faustaff nodded.

"You will have to be careful here, professor," Orelli put in. "I am serious. You had better throw in with us. United we stand, eh?"

"I prefer to stay divided, particularly if you fall as well," Faustaff replied dryly.

"This antagonism is unrealistic, professor. Cut your losses." Steifflomeis looked somewhat nervously out of the window. "The potential danger here is great; this is an unactivated simulation—it's delicate. A few wrong moves on your part would, among other things, make it almost impossible to return to any one of the other simulations—"

"Simulations of what?" said Faustaff, still trying to get concrete information from Steifflomeis.

"The original—"

"Steifflomeis!" Maggy White broke in. "What are you doing? The principals might easily decide to recall us!"

Steifflomeis responded coolly. "How will they reach us?" he asked her. "We are the most sophisticated agents they have."

"They can recall you—you know that."

"Not easily—not without some co-operation from me. They will never succeed with the simulations. They have tried too many times and failed too many times. With our knowledge we can resist them—we can become independent—live our own lives. We can leave this world only semi-activated and rule it. There would be nothing to stop us."

Maggy White lunged towards Ogg and tried to grab the machine-gun from him. He backed away. Faustaff got hold of the woman, but she already had both hands on the gun. Suddenly the gun went off. It had been set to semi-auto-

matic. A stream of bullets smashed through the window.

"Careful!" shrieked Steifflomeis.

As if startled by the firing, Maggy White took her hands away. Orelli had moved towards Ogg, but the tall Englishman turned the gun on him again and he stopped.

Steifflomeis was staring out of the window.

Faustaff looked in the same direction, and saw that where the bullets had struck the nearest house its walls were falling. One had cracked and was crumbling, but the others fell neatly down, to lie on the ground in one piece. The impression of a stage-set was retained—yet the walls, and the revealed interior of the house, which was now falling slowly, were evidently quite solid and real.

Steifflomeis turned on Maggy.

"You accuse me—and cause that to happen," he said, pointing out at the wreckage. "I suppose you were going to try to kill me."

"I still intend to."

Steifflomeis swung the pointing finger at Faustaff. "There is the one you should kill. One of us should have done it long since."

"I am not so sure now," she said. "He might even be of use to the principals. Not you, though."

"No indeed," smiled Steifflomeis, lowering his arm. "You realise what your action might have started?"

She nodded. "And that wouldn't be to your advantage, would it, Steifflomeis?"

"It would be to no-one's advantage," Steifflomeis said, rubbing his eyes. "And it would be very unpleasant for Faustaff and the others—including you, Orelli, as I've explained."

Orelli smiled to himself. It was a wickedly introspective smile as if he looked into his own soul and was pleased with the evil he found there. He leant against one of the pieces of machinery and folded his arms. "What you told me sounds almost attractive, Steifflomeis."

Faustaff became impatient. He felt that he should be taking some sort of action but he could think of nothing to do.

"We'll pay a visit to the cathedral I think," he said on impulse. "Let's get going."

Steifflomeis was plainly aware of Faustaff's uncertainty. He did not move as Ogg waved the gun towards the door.

"Why would the cathedral be better, Professor Faustaff?" he asked lightly. "After all, there are more of our men there."

"True," Faustaff answered. "But we might just as well go. I've made up my mind, Steifflomeis. Move, please." His tone was unusually firm. Hearing it, he was not sure that he liked it. Was he compromising himself too much, he wondered.

Steifflomeis shrugged and walked past Ogg towards the door. Orelli was already opening it. Maggy White and Nancy followed Ogg with Faustaff keeping an eye on Maggy.

They went out into the hall and Orelli pulled the front door wide.

The lawn and gravel path looked only slightly different from what they had left on E-3. Yet there was something hazy about them, something unformed. Faustaff thought that the feeling they aroused was familiar and as they began to walk down the path towards the street he realised that, for all their apparent reality, they had the effect of making him feel as if he were experiencing a particularly naturalistic dream.

The effect was made perfect by the stillness of the air, the complete silence everywhere. Though he could feel the gravel beneath his feet, he made no sound as he walked and neither did the others.

Even when he spoke, his voice seemed so distant that he had the impression that its sound carried around the whole planet before it reached his ears.

"Does that street lead to the cathedral?" he asked Steifflomeis, pointing to the street at the bottom of the lawn.

Steifflomeis's lips were tight. His eyes seemed to express some kind of warning as he turned and nodded at Faustaff.

Orelli appeared more relaxed. He also turned his head while he walked jauntily towards the street. "That's the one, professor," he said. His voice sounded far away, too, although it was perfectly audible.

Steifflomeis looked nervously at his partner. To Faustaff it seemed that Steifflomeis was privately wondering if he had made a mistake in joining forces with Orelli. Faustaff had known Orelli much longer than Steifflomeis and was well aware that the ex-cardinal was at best a treacherous and neurotic ally, given to moods that seemed to indicate a strong death-wish and which led him and anyone associated with him into unnecessary danger.

Wanting something to happen, something he could at least try to deal with, Faustaff almost welcomed Orelli's mood.

They reached the street. Cars were parked there. They were new and Faustaff recognised them as the latest on E-1. Evidently, whoever created these "simulations" didn't start from scratch.

There was no-one about. E-Zero seemed unpopulated. Nothing lived. Even the trees and plants gave the impression of lifelessness.

Orelli stopped and waved his arms shouting. "They're here, professor! They must have heard the shots. What are you going to do now?"

Turning a corner came about a dozen of Orelli's brigandly gang, their laser-rifles ready in their hands.

Faustaff bellowed: "Stop! We've got Steifflomeis and Orelli covered!" He felt a bit self-conscious, then, and looked at Ogg, feeling he was better able to take the initiative.

Ogg said nothing but he straddled his legs slightly and moved his machine gun a little. His expression was abnormally stern. Orelli's men stopped.

"What are you going to do now Faustaff?" Orelli repeated.

Faustaff glanced at Ogg again but Ogg apparently refused to meet his gaze. There was a big hovercar close by. Faustaff contemplated it.

Steifflomeis said softly: "It would be unwise to do anything with the automobile. Please professor, don't use any of the things you find here."

"Why not?" Faustaff asked in the same tone.

"To do so could trigger a sequence of events that would

snowball until nobody could control them. I'm speaking the truth. There is a ritual involved—every simulation has its ritual before it becomes completely activated. The gun going off doesn't appear to have had any result—but starting a car could begin the initial awakening—"

"I'll kill him if you come any closer!"

Ogg was talking to Orelli's men who had begun to stir. He was pointing the gun directly at Orelli, Steifflomeis apparently forgotten. The normally stoical Ogg now seemed to be under stress. He must have hated Orelli for a long time, Faustaff reflected. Or perhaps he hated what Orelli represented in himself. It was quite plain to them all that Ogg hoped to kill Orelli.

Only Orelli himself seemed relaxed, grinning at Ogg. Ogg frowned now, sweating. His hands shook.

"Gordon!" Faustaff said desperately. "If you kill him, they'll start shooting."

"I know," Ogg replied, and his eyes narrowed.

Behind them Maggy White had started to run up the road, away from Orelli's men. Steifflomeis was the only one to turn his head and watch her, his eyes thoughtful.

Faustaff decided to go to the car. He gripped the door handle. He pressed the button and the door opened. He noticed that the keys were in the ignition. "Keep them covered Gordon," he said as he got into the driving seat. "Come on, Nancy."

Nancy followed him, sitting next to him.

"Gordon!" he called. He started the engine. He realised that he hadn't considered the possibility that the car wouldn't work. The motor began to turn over.

Faustaff called to Ogg again and was relieved to see that he was edging towards the car. Naney opened the back door for him and he slid in. His gun was still pointing directly at Orelli.

Faustaff touched a button. The car rose on its air-cushion and they began to move down the road, slowly at first.

One shot came from a laser rifle. The beam went high.

Faustaff put his foot down, hearing Steifflomeis order the men to stop firing.

"Faustaff!" Steifflomeis yelled, and although they were

now some distance away he could hear him perfectly. "Faustaff—you and your friends will suffer most from this!"

They passed Maggy White on the way, but they didn't stop for her.

fourteen

The Time Dump

AS FAUSTAFF DROVE into downtown Los Angeles he realised that everything was not as normal as he had thought. Much of the area was unfinished, as if work on the "simulation" had been abandoned or interrupted. Houses were intact, stores bore familiar signs—but every so often he would pass something that clashed with the effect.

A tree in a garden, for instance, was recognisable as a Baiera tree with sparse, primitive foliage. The tree had flourished during the Jurassic, up to 180 million years in the past. A block that Faustaff remembered as having once been taken up with a big movie theatre was now a vacant lot. On it were pitched Indian wigwams reminiscent of those that had been used by the Western plains Indians. The whole appearance of the settlement did not give the impression of its having been built as an exhibit. Elsewhere were wooden houses of a style typical of three centuries earlier, a brand new 1908 Model T Ford with gleaming black enamel, brass fittings, and wheel-spokes picked out in red. A store window displayed women's fashions of almost two hundred years before.

Although, in general appearance, the city was the modern Los Angeles of 1999 on E-1, the anachronisms were plentiful and easily noticed standing out in sharp contrast to everything else. They added to Faustaff's impression that he was dreaming. He began to experience vague feelings of fear and he drove the car away very fast, heading towards Hollywood for no other reason than because that was where the highway was leading him.

Nancy Hunt gripped his arm. Although evidently close to hysteria herself, she tried to comfort him. "Don't worry,

Fusty," shc said. "We'll gct out of this. I can't even believe it's real."

"It's real enough," he said, relaxing a little. "Or at least the threat is. You just can't—I don't know—get to grips with the place. There's something basically intangible about it—the houses, the street, the scenery—it isn't one thing or another." He addressed Gordon Ogg who was still grim-faced, hugging his machine-gun to him, eyes hooded.

"How do you feel Gordon?"

Ogg moved in his seat and looked directly at Faustaff whosc head was half-turncd towards him. Faustaff saw that there were tears in Ogg's eyes.

"Uncomfortable," Ogg replied with some effort. "It's not just the scenery—it's me. I can't seem to control my emotions—or my mind. I feel that this world isn't so much unreal as—" he paused. "It's a different quality of reality, perhaps. We are unreal to *it*—we shouldn't be here. Even if we had a right to be here, we shouldn't be behaving as we are. It's our state of mind, if you like. That's what's wrong—our state of mind, not the place."

Faustaff nodded thoughtfully. "But do you think you'd be willing to enter the state of mind you feel this world demands?"

Ogg hesitated. Then he said: "No I don't think so."

"Then I know what you mean," Faustaff went on. "I'm going through the same thing. We've got to try to hang on, Gordon—this world wants us to alter our identities. Do you want to alter your identity?"

"No."

"Do you mean personality?" Nancy asked. "That's the feeling I've got—that at any moment if I relaxed enough I just wouldn't be me any more. It's like dying, almost. A sort of dying. I feel that something of me would be left but it would be—naked . . ."

Their attempts to express and analyse their fears had not helped. Now the atmosphere in the car was one of terror—they had brought their fears to the surface and they were unable to control them.

The car rushed down the highway, carrying a frightened cargo. Above them, the featureless sky added to their im-

pression that time and space as they knew it no longer existed, that they no longer possessed a fragment of potential influence over their situation.

Faustaff tried to speak again, to suggest that perhaps after all they should turn round and throw themselves on Steifflomeis's mercy, that he at least would have an explanation of what was happening to them, that they might accept his suggestion of their combining forces with him until they saw an opportunity of escaping from E-Zero.

The words that came out of his mouth held no meaning for him. The other two did not hear him, it seemed.

Faustaff's large hands shook violently on the steering wheel. He barely resisted the urge to let the car crash.

He drove on a while longer and then, with a feeling of hopelessness, stopped the car suddenly. He leaned over the steering wheel, his face contorted, his mouth gibbering while another part of his mind sought the core of sanity that must still be within him and which might help him resist the identity-sapping influence of E-Zero.

Did he want to resist? The question kept entering his mind. At length, in trying to answer, he recovered partial sanity. Yes, he did—at least, until he understood what he was resisting.

He looked up. There were no houses in the immediate vicinity. There were some seen in the distance behind and ahead of him, but here the highway went across sparse grassland. It looked like a site that had been levelled for development and then left. What caught his eye, however, was the dump.

At first glance it looked like a garbage dump, a huge hill of miscellaneous junk.

Then Faustaff realised that it wasn't junk. All the objects looked new and whole.

On impulse he got out of the car and began to walk towards the vast heap.

As he got closer he could see that it was even bigger than he had first thought. It rose at least a hundred feet above him. He saw a complete Greek Winged Victory in marble; a seventeenth century arquebus, gleaming oak, brass and iron; a large Chinese kite painted with a dragon's head in brilliant primary colours. A Fokker

Triplane of the type used in the 1914-18 war lay close to the top, its wood and canvas as new as the day it left its factory. There were wagon wheels and what looked like an Egyptian boat; a throne that might have belonged to a Byzantine Emperor; a big Victorian urn bearing a heavy floral pattern; an Indian elephant howdah; a stuffed Timber Wolf; a sixteenth century arbalest—a crossbow made of steel; a late eighteenth century electric generator; a set of Japanese horse armour on a beautifully carved wooden horse, and a North African drum; a life-sized bronze statue of a Sinhalese woman; a Scandinavian rune stone and a Babylonian obelisk.

All history seemed to have been piled together at random. It was a mountain of treasure, as if some mad museum curator had found a way of up-ending his museum and shaking its contents out on to the ground. Yet the artifacts did not have the look of museum-pieces. Everything looked absolutely new.

Faustaff approached the heap until he stood immediately beneath it. At his feet lay a near-oval shield of wood and leather. It looked as if it belonged to the fourteenth century and the workmanship seemed Italian to Faustaff. It was richly decorated with gold and red paint and its main motif showed an ornate mythical lion; beside it, on its side, was a beautiful clock dating from around 1700. It was of steel and silver filigree and might have been the work of the greatest clockmaker of his time, Thomas Tompion. Few other craftsmen, Faustaff thought abstractedly, could have created such a clock. Quite close to the clock he saw a skull of blue crystal. It could only have been fifteenth century Aztec. Faustaff had seen one like it in the British Museum. Half-covering the crystal skull was a grotesque ceremonial mask that looked as if it came from New Guinea, the features painted to represent a devil.

Faustaff felt overwhelmed by the richness and beauty —and the sheer variety—of the jumble of objects. Somehow it represented an aspect of what he had been fighting for since he had taken over the organisation from his father and agreed to try to preserve the worlds of subspace.

He reached down and picked up the heavy Tompion clock, running his fingers over the ornate silver. A key hung by a red cord from the back. He opened the glass door at the front and inserted the key. Smoothly the key turned and he started to wind the clock. Inside a balance wheel began to swing with a muted tick-tock. Faustaff set the hands to twelve o'clock and, holding the clock carefully, put it down.

Although the sense of unreality about his surroundings was still strong, this action had helped him. He squatted in front of the clock and tried to think, his back to the great mound of antiques.

He concentrated his whole attention on the clock as, with an effort, he considered what he knew about E-Zero.

It was fairly obvious that E-Zero was simply the latest "simulation" created by whoever had employed Steifflomeis, Maggy White and the D-squaders. It was also almost certain that this simulation was no different from what the other thousand had been like at the same stage. His own world, E-1, must therefore have been created in the same way, its history beginning at the point where E-2's history had become static. That would mean that E-1 had been created in the early sixties, shortly before his own birth, but certainly not before his father's birth—and his father had discovered the alternate worlds in 1971. It was unpleasant to consider that his father, and many of the people he had known and some of whom he still knew, must have been "activated" on a world that had originally been a world like E-Zero. Had the inhabitants of his own world been transported from one subspacial world to another? If so, how had they been conditioned into accepting their new environment? There was no explanation as he wondered again why the inhabitants of all the worlds other than E-1 accepted without question the changes in their society and their geography resulting from a series of Unstable Matter Situations? He had often wondered about it. He had once described them as seeming to live in a perpetual dream and a perpetual present.

The difference on E-Zero was that *he* felt real enough, but the whole planet seemed to be a dream-world also in a state of static time. For all the bizarre changes that

had taken place on the other subspacial worlds, he had never got this impression from them—only from the inhabitants.

Evidently the conditioning that occurred on the drastically altered worlds would be applied more or less in reverse on E-Zero.

He could not consider who had created the alternate Earths. He would have to hope that at some time he would be able to get the answers once and for all, from either Maggy White or Steifflomeis. He could not even guess why the worlds had been created and then destroyed. The kind of science necessary for such a task would be far too sophisticated for him to comprehend immediately, even if he never learned its principles.

The creators of the subspacial worlds seemed unable to interfere with them directly. That was why they had created the android D-Squaders, obviously—to destroy their work. Steifflomeis and Maggy White had made a more recent appearance. Plainly, they were either human or robots of a much more advanced type than the D-Squaders and their job was not directly concerned with demolishing the subspacial Earths but with eliminating random factors like himself.

Therefore the creators, whoever and wherever they were, were not able to control their creations completely. The inhabitants of the worlds must have a fair degree of free will, otherwise he and his father would never have been able to set up the organisation they had used to preserve and bring relief to the other alternates. The creators, in short, were by no means omnipotent—they were not even omniscient, otherwise they would have acted sooner than they had in sending Steifflomeis and Maggy White in to get rid of him. That was encouraging, at least. It was obvious, too, that Steifflomeis believed they could be disobeyed, for Steifflomeis had plainly reneged on them and was out to oppose them. Whether or not this opposition would succeed Faustaff could not tell since only Steifflomeis and Maggy White knew exactly what was opposed. Maggy White was still loyal. Perhaps she had some way of contracting her "principals" and had already warned them of Steifflomeis's treachery. Steifflomeis hadn't ap-

peared to be worried by this possibility. Could these principals be relying solely on Steifflomeis and Maggy White? Why, if that were the case, were they so powerful and at the same time so powerless? Another question he could not yet begin to answer.

Faustaff remembered that he had recently considered temporarily taking Steifflomeis up on his offer. Now he rejected the idea. Steifflomeis and Orelli had both proven untrustworthy—Steifflomeis to his employers, Orelli to him. But Maggy White seemed loyal to her principals and she had once said that Faustaff's ideals and theirs were not so different in the long-term.

Maggy White then, must be found. If he were going to seek anyone's help—and it was evident that he must—then she was the one. There was a strong possibility, of course, that she had now left E-Zero or been captured by Steifflomeis.

All that he could hope for now, he thought, would be a chance of contacting the creators. Then at least he would know exactly what he fought. Perhaps Maggy White could be convinced. Hadn't she said to Steifflomeis that he, Faustaff, would be of more use to her principals than Steifflomeis now? Faustaff had failed to thwart them, but he could still hope to find a way of convincing them of the immorality of their actions.

He had no idea where Maggy had gone. The only course open to him was to retrace his journey and see if he could find her.

All this time he had been staring at the clock, but now he noticed the position of the hands; exactly an hour had passed. He got to his feet and picked up the clock.

Looking about him he still felt disturbed by the continuing unreality of his surroundings; but he felt less confused by them, less at their mercy.

He began to walk back towards the car.

It was only when he had reached it and climbed in that he realised Nancy Hunt and Gordon Ogg were no longer there.

He looked in all directions, hoping that he would see them; but they were gone.

Had they been captured by Steifflomeis and Orelli?

Had Maggy White found them and forced them to go with her? Or had they simply fled, totally demoralised by their fear?

Now there was an additional reason for finding Maggy White as soon as possible.

fifteen

The Crucifixion in the Cathedral

AS HE DROVE back down the highway, seeing the spires of the cathedral over the roofs of the houses ahead, Faustaff wished that he had brought one of the guns he had seen on the dump. He would have felt better for possessing a weapon of some kind.

He slowed the car suddenly as he saw some figures approaching him down the middle of the highway. They were behaving in a peculiar way and seemed oblivious to his car.

When he got closer he recognised them as Orelli's men, but differently dressed. They wore unfamiliar, festive costumes of the kind normally seen at carnivals. Some were dressed as Roman soldiers; some, he gathered, as priests, and others as women. They came down the highway performing an exaggerated high-stepping walk and they wore rapt, uncomprehending expressions.

Faustaff felt no fear of them and sounded the car's horn. They did not appear to hear it. Very slowly, he drove the car around them, looking at them as closely as he could. There was something familiar about the costumes; what they represented struck a chord in him, but he could not analyse what it was, and he did not feel he had the time to work it out.

He passed them and then passed the house in which he'd been transported to E-Zero. The house still looked much more real in contrast to the others near it. He turned a bend in the street and saw the cathedral ahead. It was in its own grounds, surrounded by a stone wall. Let into the wall were two solid gate-posts and the big wrought-iron gates were open. He drove straight through them. He felt that caution would be useless.

He stopped the car at the west-front of the cathedral where the main entrance lay, flanked by tall towers. Like most cathedrals, this one seemed to have been built and rebuilt over several centuries though in general appearance it was Gothic, with the unmistakable arches of its stained-glass windows and heavy, iron-studded doors.

Faustaff mounted the few steps until he stood at the doors. They were slightly ajar and he pushed them partially open, just enough for him to pass through. He walked into the nave, the vast ceiling rising above him, and it was as empty of seats as it had been when he had last been in it. But the altar was there now, and candles burned on it. It was covered by an exquisite altar cloth. Faustaff barely noticed these, for it was the life-size crucifix behind the altar which drew his attention. Not only was it life-size but peculiarly life-like, also. Faustaff walked rapidly towards it, refusing to believe what he already knew to be true.

The cross was of plain wood, though well-finished.

The figure nailed to it was alive.

It was Orelli, naked and bleeding from wounds in his hands and feet, his chest rising and falling rapidly, his head hanging on his chest.

Now Faustaff realised what Orelli's men had represented—the people of Calvary. They must certainly have been the ones who had crucified him.

With a grunt of horror Faustaff ran forward and climbed on the altar reaching up to see how he could get Orelli down. The ex-cardinal smelled of sweat and his body was lacerated. On his head was a thorn garland.

What had caused Orelli's men to do this to him? It was surely no conscious perversion of Christianity; no deliberate blasphemy. Faustaff doubted that Orelli's brigands cared enough for religion to do what they had done.

He would need something to lever the nails out.

Then Orelli raised his head and opened his eyes.

Faustaff was shocked by the tranquillity he saw in those eyes. Orelli's whole face seemed transformed not into a travesty of Christ but into a living representation of Christ.

Orelli smiled sweetly at Faustaff. "Can I help you, my son?" he said calmly.

"Orelli?" Faustaff was unable to say anything else for a moment. He paused. "How did this happen?" he asked eventually.

"It was my destiny," Orelli replied. "I knew it and they understood what they must do. I must die, you see."

"This is insane!" Faustaff began trying to tug at one of the nails. "You aren't Christ! What's happening?"

"What must happen," Orelli said in the same even tone. "Go away, my son. Do not question this. Leave me."

"But you're Orelli—a traitor, murderer, renegade. You —you don't deserve this! You've no right—" Faustaff was an atheist and to him Christianity was one of many religions that had ceased to serve any purpose, but something in the spectacle before him disturbed him. "The Christ in the Bible was an idea, not a man!" he shouted. "You've turned it inside out!"

"We are all ideas," Orelli replied, "either our own or someone else's. I am an idea in their minds and I am the same idea in my own. What has happened is true—it is real—it is necessary! Do not try to help me. I don't need any help."

Though he spoke distantly, Faustaff had the impression that Orelli also spoke with preternatural lucidity. It gave him some insight into what he feared on E-Zero. The world not only threatened to destroy the personality—it turned a man inside out. Orelli's outer *persona* was buried within him somewhere (if he had not lost it altogether) and here was revealed his innermost self ; not the Devil he had tried to be but the Christ he had wanted to be.

Slowly, Faustaff got down from the altar while Orelli's calm face smiled at him. It was no idiot's smile, it was not insane—it was a smile of fulfilment. Its sanity and tranquillity terrified Faustaff. He turned his back on it and began to walk with effort towards the door.

As he neared it a figure stepped out from the shadows of the arches and touched his arm.

"Orelli does not only die for you professor," Steifflomeis said smiling. "He dies because of you. You began the activation. I compliment you on your strength of will. I should have expected you to have succumbed by now. All the others have."

"Succumbed to what exactly, Steifflomeis?"

"To the Ritual—the Activation Ritual. Every new planet must undergo it. Under normal circumstances the entire population of a fresh simulation must play out its myth rôles before it awakes. 'The work before the dream and the dream before the wakening', as some writer of yours once put it. You people have some reasonable insights into your situation from time to time, you know. Come." Steifflomeis led Faustaff from the cathedral, "I can take you to see more. The show is about to start in earnest. I can't guarantee that you will survive it."

A sun now shone in the sky, bringing bright lights and heavy shade to the world, though it still did not live. The sun was swollen and a glowing red; Faustaff blinked and reached into his pocket to get his sunglasses. He put them on.

"That's right," grinned Steifflomeis. "Gird on your armour and prepare for an interesting battle."

"Where are we going?" Faustaff asked vaguely.

"Out into the world. You will see it naked. Every man has his rôle to play today. You have defeated me, Faustaff—perhaps you had not realised that. You have set E-Zero in motion by your ignorant actions. I can only hope that E-Zero will defeat you in turn, though I am not sure."

"Why aren't you sure?" Faustaff asked, still only half-interested.

"There are levels that even I had not prepared for," Steifflomeis answered. "Perhaps you will not find your rôle on E-Zero. Perhaps you have resisted and retained your personality because you are already living your rôle. Could it be that we have all underestimated you?"

sixteen

The Revels of E-Zero

FAUSTAFF COULD NOT understand the full implication of Steifflomeis's statement but he allowed the man to lead him out of the cathedral grounds and into a wooded park behind it.

"You know there is little left of E-1 now," Steifflomeis said casually as they walked. "The war was very brief. I think a few survivors are lingering on, by all accounts."

Faustaff knew that Steifflomeis had deliberately chosen this moment to tell him, probably hoping to demoralise him. He controlled the feelings of loss and despair that came to him and tried to answer as casually.

"It was only to be expected, I suppose."

Steifflomeis smiled. "You might be pleased to know that many people from the other simulations have been transferred to E-Zero. Not an act of mercy on the part of the principals, of course. Merely a selection of the most likely specimens for populating this Earth."

Faustaff paused. Ahead he could make out a number of figures. He peered through the trees at them, frowning. Most of them were naked. Like Orelli's men, they were moving in a ritualistic, puppet-like manner, their faces blank. There was an approximately equal number of men and women.

Steifflomeis waved a hand. "They will not see us—we are invisible to them while they are in this state."

Faustaff was fascinated. "What are they doing?"

"Oh, working out their positions in the world. We'll go a little closer, if you like."

Steifflomeis led Faustaff towards the group.

Faustaff felt he was witnessing an ancient and primitive ceremony. People seemed to be imitating animals of various kinds. One man had branches tied to his head in a familiar representation of a stag. A combination of man, beast and plant which was significant to Faustaff without his understanding quite why. A woman stooped and picked up the skin of a lioness draping it around her naked body. There was a pile of animal skins in the centre of the posturing group. Some of the people already wore skins or masks. Here were representations of bears, owls, hares, wolves, snakes, eagles, bats, foxes, badgers and many other animals. A fire burned to one side of the glade.

Soon the whole group had clothed itself in pelts or masks.

In the centre now stood a woman. She wore a dog's skin around her shoulders and a crudely painted dog's

mask on her face. She had long black hair that escaped from behind the mask and fell down her back. The dance around her became increasingly formal, but much faster than previously.

Faustaff grew tense as he watched.

The circle drew tighter and tighter around the dog-woman. She stood there impassively until the group suddenly stopped and faced her. Then she began to cringe, raising her head in a long drawn out canine howl, her arms stretched in front of her with the palms outwards.

With a roar they closed on her.

Faustaff began to run forward bent on trying to help the girl. Steifflomeis pulled at his arm.

"Too late," he said. "It never takes long."

The group was already backing away. Faustaff glimpsed the mangled corpse of the girl lying on the ground, the dog-skin draped across her.

Bloody-mouthed, the horned man ran towards the fire and pulled a brand from it. Others brought wood that had already been gathered, heaping it around the girl. The wood was ignited and the pyre began to burn.

A wordless, ululating song began to come from the lips of the group and another dance began; this time it seemed to symbolise exaltation of some kind.

Faustaff turned away. "That is nothing but magic, Steifflomeis—primitive supersition. What kind of perverse minds have your principals if they can produce scientific miracles and—permit *that*!"

"Permit? They encourage it. It is necessary to every simulation."

"How can ritual sacrifice be necessary to a modern society?"

"You ask that, after your own simulation has just destroyed itself? There was little difference, you know—only the scale and the complexity. The woman died quickly. She might have died more slowly of radiation sickness on E-1 if that was where she came from."

"But what purpose does a thing like that serve?"

Steifflomeis shrugged. "Ah, purpose Faustaff. You think there is purpose?"

"I must think so, Steifflomeis."

"It is supposed to serve a limited purpose, that sort of ritual. Even in your terms, it should be obvious that primitive peoples symbolise their fears and wishes in ritual. The cowardly dog, the malevolent woman—both were destroyed in that rite you witnessed."

"Yet in reality, they continue to exist. That kind of ritual achieves nothing."

"Only a temporary feeling of security. You are right. You are a rational man, Faustaff. I still fail to understand why you would not join forces with me—for I am also a rational man. You cling to primitive instincts, naïve ideals. You refuse to let your reason have full reign over you. Then you are shocked by what you have just seen. It is within the power of neither of us to change those people, but we could have taken advantage of their weaknesses and at least benefited ourselves."

Faustaff could think of no reply, but he remained deeply unconvinced by Steifflomeis's argument. He shook his head slowly.

Steifflomeis made an impatient movement. "Still? I had at least hoped that you would join me in defeat!" He laughed.

They left the park and walked along a street. On lawns, in the streets, on vacant lots and in gardens, the ritualistic revels of E-Zero were taking place. Steifflomeis and Faustaff were unnoticed and undisturbed. It was more than a reversion to the primitive, Faustaff thought as they wandered through the scenes of dark carnival, it was a total adoption of the identities of psychological-mythical archetypes. As Steifflomeis had said, every man and woman had their rôle. These rôles fell into a few definite categories. The more outstanding ones dominated the rest. He saw men and women in cowled cloaks, their faces hidden, driving dozens of naked acolytes before them with flails or tree-branches; he saw a man copulating with a woman dressed as an ape, another woman, taking no part herself, seemed to be ordering an orgy. Everywhere were scenes of bloodshed and bestiality. It reminded Faustaff of the Roman Games, of the Dark Ages, of the Nazis. But there were other rituals that did not seem to fit in;

they were quieter, less frenetic rituals that reminded Faustaff strongly of the few church services he had attended as a child.

Some kind of attitude was beginning to dawn in his confused mind, some realisation of why he had refused to agree with Steifflomeis in spite of everything he had discovered since their first meeting.

If he were witnessing magical ceremonies, then they were of two distinct kinds. He knew little about anthropology or superstition, mistrusted Jung and found mysticism boring—yet he had heard of Black Magic and White Magic, without understanding the differences that people claimed for them. Perhaps what had horrified him was the black variety. Were the other scenes he had noticed the manifestations of white magic?

The very idea of thinking in terms of magic or superstition apalled him. He was a scientist and to him magic meant ignorance and the encouragement of ignorance. It meant senseless murder, fatalism, suicide, hysteria. Suddenly the idea came to him that it also meant the Hydrogen Bomb and World War. It meant in short, the rejection of the human factor in one's nature—the total acceptance of the beast. But what was white magic? Ignorance, also probably. The black variety encouraged the bestial side of Man's nature, so perhaps the white variety encouraged —what?—the "godly" side? The will to evil and the will to good. Nothing wrong with that as an idea. But Man was not a beast and he was not a god; he was Man. Intellect was what distinguished him from other species of animal. Magic, as far as Faustaff knew, rejected reason. Religion accepted it, of course, but hardly encouraged it. Only science accepted it and encouraged it. Faustaff suddenly saw mankind's social and psychological evolution in a clear, simple light. Science alone accepted Man as he was and sought to exploit his full potential.

Yet this planet he stood on was the creation of a superb understanding of science—and at the same time these dreadful magical rituals were allowed to take place.

For the first time Faustaff felt that the creators of the simulations had gone wrong somewhere—gone wrong in their own terms.

With a shock he acknowledged the possibility that not even they understood what they were doing.

He turned to suggest this to Steifflomeis, whom he had assumed was following just behind him.

But Steifflomeis had gone.

seventeen

The Black Ritual

THEN FAUSTAFF GLIMPSED Steifflomeis just before the man turned a corner of the street. He began to run after him, pushing through the revellers who did not see him.

Steifflomeis was climbing into a car when Faustaff next saw him. Faustaff shouted but Steifflomeis did not reply. He started the car and was soon speeding away.

Another car was parked nearby. Faustaff climbed into it and was soon giving chase.

More than once he was forced to swerve to avoid groups of people who were, like the others, completely oblivious of him, but he kept on Steifflomeis's trail without too much difficulty.

Steifflomeis was on the Long Beach road. Soon the sea was visible ahead. Steifflomeis began to follow the coast and Faustaff noticed that even the seashore was not free of its rituals. There was a big, old hacienda-style house visible ahead and Faustaff saw Steifflomeis turn his car into its drive.

Faustaff wasn't sure that Steifflomeis had realised he was being followed. Out of caution he stopped his own car a short distance before he reached the house. He got out and began to walk towards it.

By the time Faustaff had walked warily up the drive, he found Steifflomeis's car empty. Evidently the man had gone inside.

The front door of the house was locked. He walked around it until he came to a window. He looked in. The window opened in to a large room that seemed to take up most of the ground floor.

Steifflomeis was in there and so were a great many others. Faustaff saw Maggy White there. She was glower-

ing at Steifflomeis who wore his familiar mocking grin. Maggy White was dressed in a loose black robe. Its hood was thrown back over her shoulders. Apart from her, only Steifflomeis wore any kind of conventional clothing.

The others all wore black hoods and nothing else. The women knelt in the centre, their bowed heads towards Maggy White. The men stood around the walls. Some of them held large, black candles. One of them gripped a huge mediacval sword.

Maggy White seated herself in a throne-like chair at one end of the room. She was speaking to Steifflomeis who gestured at her and left the room for a moment to re-appear wearing a similar robe to the one she wore.

Maggy White disapproved but seemed to be able to do nothing to stop Steifflomeis.

Faustaff wondered why she should be involving herself in a ritual. It was, even to him, evidently a black magic ritual, with Maggy representing the Queen of Darkness or whatever it was. Steifflomeis now seated himself at the other end of the room and arranged his robe, smiling at Maggy and saying something which caused her to frown even more heavily.

From what he knew of such things, Faustaff supposed that Steifflomeis was representing the Prince of Darkness. He seemed to remember that the woman usually had a male lieutenant.

Two of the men went out and came back with a very beautiful young girl. She was certainly under twenty and probably much younger. She seemed totally dazed, but not in the same trancelike state as the others. Faustaff got the impression that she had not undergone the psychological reversal that the rest had suffered. Her blonde hair was piled on her head and her body looked as if it had been oiled.

The kneeling women rose as she entered and they stepped back towards the wall to line it like the men.

Rather reluctantly, Maggy signed to Steifflomeis who rose and walked jauntily towards the girl, parodying the ritualistic movements of the people. The two men forced the girl down so that she was lying on her back in front of Steifflomeis who stared smilingly down at her. He half-

turned to Maggy and spoke. The woman pursed her lips and her eyes were angry.

To Faustaff it seemed that Maggy White might be going through with something she did not like, but doing it conscientiously. Steifflomeis, on the other hand, was enjoying himself, plainly taking a delight in his power over the others.

He knelt in front of the girl and began to caress her body. Faustaff saw the girl's head jerk suddenly and her eyes flare into awareness. He saw her begin to struggle. The two men stepped forward and held her.

Faustaff looked down and saw a large flat stone, used as part of the garden's decoration. He picked it up and flung it through the window.

He had expected the people to be startled by his action, but as he clambered through the window he saw that only Maggy White and Steifflomeis were staring at him.

"Leave her alone, Steifflomeis," Faustaff said.

"Someone has to do it, professor," Steifflomeis said calmly. "Besides which, we are the best people for the job, Miss White and myself. We do not act from any kind of instinct. There is no lust in us—is there, Miss White?"

Maggy White simply shook her head, her lips tight.

"We have no instincts whatsoever, professor," Steifflomeis went on. "It is a source of regret to Miss White, I think, but not to me. After all, you are an example of how certain instincts can be harmful to a man."

"I've seen you angry and frightened," Faustaff reminded him.

"Certainly I might have expressed anger and fear—but these were mental states, not emotional ones, or is there no difference in your terms, professor?"

"Why are you taking part in these things?" Faustaff ignored Steifflomeis's question and addressed them both.

"For amusement in my case," Steifflomeis said. "I am equipped to experience sensual pleasure, also—though I do not spend a lifetime seeking it as you seem to."

"There could be more to it," Maggy White said quietly. "I've already said this to you—maybe they can experience more pleasure."

"I'm aware of your obsession, Miss White," Steifflo-

meis smiled. "But I am sure you're wrong. Everything they do is on a puny scale." He looked at Faustaff. "You see, professor, Miss White feels that by taking part in these rites it will somehow confirm on her a mysterious ecstacy. She thinks you have something we do not."

"Perhaps we have," Faustaff said.

"Perhaps it is not worth having," Steifflomeis suggested.

"I'm not sure," Faustaff looked at the people around him. The two men were still holding the girl, though now she seemed to have lapsed into a similar state to their own. "It doesn't have to be this."

"No indeed." Steifflomeis's tone was sardonic. "It could be something else. I think your friends Nancy Hunt and Gordon Ogg are involved in something you would prefer."

"Are they all right?"

"Perfectly at this stage. They have come to no physical harm." Steifflomeis grinned.

"Where are they?"

"They ought to be somewhere nearby."

"Hollywood," Maggy White said. "One of the film company lots."

"Which one?"

"Simone-Dane-Keene, I think. It's almost an hour's drive."

Faustaff pushed the two men aside and picked up the girl.

"Where do you think you're taking her?" Steifflomeis mocked. "She won't know anything after the activation."

"Call me a dog in the manger," Faustaff said as he carried the girl towards the front door and unlatched it.

He walked out to the street, reached his car, dumped the girl in the back seat and began the drive towards Hollywood.

eighteen

The White Ritual

THE CAR WAS fast and the freeways clear. As he drove, Faustaff wondered about the pair he had left. From what Steifflomeis had said, it was fairly obvious that they

weren't human; were probably, as he'd suspected, near-human androids, more advanced versions of the robot D-squaders.

He hadn't asked the nature of the ritual in which, he assumed, Nancy and Gordon had become involved. He simply wanted to reach them as soon as possible so that he could be of help to them if they needed it.

He knew the S-D-K lot. S-D-K had been the biggest of the old-style motion picture makers on E-1. He had once visited the lot from curiosity on one of his occasional trips to E-1 Los Angeles.

Every so often he found it necessary to slow the car and steer through or around a throng of people performing what were to him obscure rites. They were not all obscene or violent, but the sight of the blank faces was sufficient to disturb him.

He had noticed a change, however. The buildings seemed in slightly sharper focus than when he had first arrived on E-Zero. The impression of newness, too, was beginning to wear off a little. Evidently these pre-activation rites had some link with the altering nature of the new planet. From his own experience he knew that it was this world's influence which produced the inability to associate properly, the quite rapid loss of personal identity, the slip-back into the rôle of whatever psychological archetype was strongest in the particular psyche of the individual; but there also seemed to be a kind of feedback where the people somehow helped to give the planet a more positive atmosphere of reality. Faustaff found the idea hard to grasp in any terms familiar to him.

He was nearing Hollywood now. He could see the big illuminated S-D-K sign ahead. Soon, he was turning into the lot. It was silent, apparently empty. He got out of the car, leaving the girl where she was. He locked the doors and began to walk in the direction of a notice which said *NO. 1 STAGE.*

A door was set in the concrete wall. It was covered with cautionary signs. Faustaff pushed it open and looked inside. The jungle of cameras and electronic equipment partially hid a set. It looked like a set for an historical film. There was nobody in sight.

Faustaff tried the next stage. He walked in. There were no cameras about and all the equipment seemed neatly stowed. A set was up, however. It was probably being used for the same film. It showed the interior of a mediaeval castle. For a moment Faustaff wondered at the craftsmen who had built the set so that it looked so convincing.

There was a ritual being enacted on the set. Nancy Hunt was wearing a white, diaphanous shift and her red hair had been combed out and arranged to flow over her back and shoulders. Beside her was a man dressed in black armour that looked real. Either the costume was from the film, or else it had come from the same source as all the other costumes that Faustaff had seen. The man in black armour was drawing down his visor. He had a huge broadsword in his right hand.

With a measured tread another figure came clumping from the wings. It was Gordon Ogg, also in full armour of bright steel with a plain white surcoat over it. He held a large sword in his right hand.

Faustaff shouted: "Nancy! Gordon! What are you doing?"

They didn't hear. Evidently they were as much in a dreamlike state as the rest.

With peculiar movements which resembled, to Faustaff, the highly mannered motions of a traditional Japanese mime-play, Ogg approached Nancy and the black-armoured man. His lips moved in speech, but Faustaff could tell that no words sounded.

In an equally formal way the black-armoured man gripped Nancy's arm and pulled her back, away from Ogg. Ogg now lowered his visor and seemed to challenge the other man with a movement of his sword.

Faustaff didn't think that Ogg was in any danger. He watched as Nancy stepped to one side and Ogg and his opponent touched swords. Shortly the black-armoured man dropped his sword and knelt in front of Gordon Ogg. Ogg then threw away his sword. The man rose and began to strip off his armour. Nancy came forward and also knelt before Ogg. Then she got up and left the set, returning with a large golden cup which she offered to Ogg. He took it and drank from it—or pretended to, since Faustaff

could see it was actually empty. Ogg picked up his sword and sheathed it

Faustaff realised that he had only witnessed a small part of thc ceremony and it now seemed over. What would Nancy and Gordon do?

There was a little more mime, with Nancy appearing to offer herself to Ogg and being sympathetically rejected. Then Ogg turned and began to move off the set, followed by everyone else. He held the golden cup high. It was obviously a symbol that meant something to him and the others.

Faustaff wondered if it represented the Holy Grail, and then wondered what the Holy Grail represented in Christian mythology and mysticism. Didn't it have a much older origin? Hadn't he read about a similar bowl appearing in Celtic mythology? He couldn't be sure.

Ogg, Nancy and the rest were now walking past him. He decided to follow them. At least he would be able to keep a watchful eye on his friends to make sure they didn't come to harm. It was, he reflected, like trying to deal with a somnambulist. It was probably even more dangerous to attempt to wake them up. Sleep-walkers, he now remembered, were said to perform rituals of this kind sometimes —usually simpler, but occasionally quite complex. There must surely be a link.

The procession left the set and walked out into the arena-like compound. Tall concrete walls rose on every side.

They paused here and turned their faces to the sun, Gordon raising the bowl towards it, as if to catch its rays. A subdued chanting could now be heard coming from them all. It was a wordless chant—or at least in a language completely unfamiliar to Faustaff. It had vague affinities with Greek, but it was more like the Voice of Tongues which Faustaff had heard on television once. How had it been described by a psychologist? The language of the unconscious. It was the kind of sound people used in their sleep sometimes. Faustaff found it slightly unnerving as he listened to the chant.

They were still chanting as Steifflomeis made his appearance. He had found a sword from somewhere and

was glcefully leading the blaek-hooded acolytes into the arena. Maggy White, looking rather uneertain, followed behind. She seemed to be almost as much in Steifflomeis's power as the men who were with him.

Gordon Ogg turned as Steifflomeis shouted something in the same strange language they had been chanting in. From Steifflomeis the words seemed halting, as if he had learned them with difficulty.

Faustaff knew that Steifflomeis was shouting a challenge.

Gordon Ogg handed the cup to Naney and drew his sword.

Watehing the seene, Faustaff was suddenly struek by its ludierousness. He began to laugh aloud. It was his old laugh, rieh and warm, totally without tension. The laughter was pieked up by the high walls and amplified, its eehoes rolling around the arena.

For a moment everyone seemed to hear it and hesitated. Then, with a yell, Steifflomeis leapt at Ogg.

This action only eaused Faustaff to laugh the more.

nineteen

The Encounter

STEIFFLOMEIS SEEMED BENT on killing Ogg, but he was sueh an inept swordsman that the Englishman, plainly trained in fencing, defended himself easily, in spite of the fact that his movements were so formal.

Faustaff snorted with laughter and stepped forward to grasp Steifflomeis's arm. The android was startled. Faustaff removed the sword from his hand.

"This is all part of the ritual!" Steifflomeis said seriously. "You're breaking the rules again."

"Calm down, Steifflomeis." Faustaff chuckled and wiped his eyes. "No need to get emotional."

Gordon was still going through the motions of defenee. He looked so mueh like Don Quixote in his armour and long moustache that his behaviour seemed funnier than ever to Faustaff who started to roar with laughter again.

Ogg began to look bewildered. His movements became more hesitant and less formal. Faustaff placed himself in

front of him. Ogg blinked and lowered his sword. He frowned at Faustaff for a moment and then snapped down his visor and stood there rigidly, like a statue.

Faustaff raised his fist and tapped on the helmet. "Come out of there, Gordon—you don't need the armour any more. Wake up, Gordon!"

He saw that the others were beginning to stir. He went up to Nancy and stroked her face. "Nancy?"

She smiled vaguely, without looking at him.

"Nancy—it's Faustaff."

"Faustaff," she murmured distantly. "Fusty?"

He grinned. "The same."

She looked up at him, still smiling. He chuckled and she looked into his eyes. Her smile broadened. "Hi, Fusty. What's new?"

"You'd be surprised," he said. "Have you ever seen anything so funny?" He waved his hand to indicate the costumed figures about them. He pointed at the suit of armour. "Gordon's in there," he told her.

"I know," she said. "I really thought I was dreaming—you know, one of those dreams where you know you're dreaming but can't do anything about it. It was quite a nice dream."

"Nothing wrong with dreams, I guess," Faustaff said, putting his arm round her and hugging her. "They serve their purpose, but . . ."

"This dream was serving a purpose until you interrupted it," Maggy White said.

"But did you agree with the purpose?" Faustaff asked her.

"Well—yes. The whole thing is necessary. I told you."

"I still don't know the original purposes for the simulations," Faustaff admitted. "But it seems to me that nothing can be achieved by this sort of thing."

"I'm not sure," Maggy White replied thoughtfully. "I don't know . . . I'm still loyal to the principals, but I wonder— They don't seem very successful."

"You're not kidding," Faustaff agreed feelingly. "What have they scrapped? A thousand simulations?"

"They'll never succeed," Steifflomeis sneered. "They've lost touch completely. Forget them."

Maggy White turned on him angrily. "This whole fiasco is your work, Steifflomeis. If you hadn't disobeyed your orders, E-Zero would now be well on the way to normal activation. I don't know what's going to happen now. This will be the first time that anything has gone wrong *before* full activation!"

"You should have listened to me. We need never have allowed full aetivation if we had been careful. We could have ruled this world easily. We could have defied the principals. At best all they could have done would have been to start afresh."

"There isn't time to start afresh. It would be tantamount to destroying their whole project, what you would have done!" Maggy glowered at him. "You tried to defeat the principals!"

Steifflomeis turned his back on her with a sigh.

"You're too idealistic. Forget them. They are failures."

Gordon Ogg's armour creaked. His arm moved towards his visor and slowly began to raise it. He looked out at them, blinking.

"By God," he said wonderingly. "Am I really dressed up in this stuff. I thought I was—"

"Dreaming? You must be hot in there, Gordon," Faustaff said. "Can you get it off?"

Ogg tugged at the helmet. "I think it screws off," he said. Faustaff grasped the helmet and with some difficulty eased it round. Ogg took it off. They began to unstrap the rest of the armour, Nancy helping. A murmur of voices around them showed that both the people who had been with Steifflomeis and the people who had followed Gordon and Nancy were now waking up, confused.

Faustaff saw Maggy White stoop towards the sword and jumped up from where he was trying to unbuckle Gordon's left greave.

She had brought the sword down on Steifflomeis's skull before he eould reach her. He turned towards her with a smile, reached out for her, and then toppled. The top of his head had caved in completely, showing the brain. No blood came. Maggy began to hack at his body until Faustaff stopped her. She became impassive, looking down at Steifflomeis's eorpse. "A work of art," she said. "Like me."

"What are you going to do now?" Faustaff asked her. "I don't know," she said. "Everything's gone wrong. All the rites you've seen are only the beginning. There's a series of huge assemblies later on—the final pre-activation rituals. You've broken the pattern."

"Surely what's happened can't make much difference on a world scale."

"You don't understand. Every symbol means something. Every individual has a rôle. It's all connected together. It's like a complicated electronic circuit—break it in one place and the whole thing seizes up. These rituals may seem horrifying and primitive to you—but they were inspired by a deeper knowledge of scientific principles than anything you're likely to have. The rituals establish the basic pattern of every individual's life. His inner drives are expressed and given form in the pre-activation rituals. This means that when he 'wakes up' and begins to lead his ordinary life, the code is imprinted in him and he will exist according to that code. Only a few, comparatively speaking, find new codes—new symbols—new lives. You're one of them—the most successful.

"Circumstances and your own integrity have enabled you to do what you have done. What the result will be, I can't think. There seems to be no division between your inner life and your outer personality. It's as if you are playing a rôle whose influence goes beyond the bounds of the principals' experiments and affects them directly. I don't think they intended to produce a type like you."

"Will you tell me now who these 'principals' are?" Faustaff asked her quietly.

"I can't," she said. "I obey them and I have been instructed to reveal as little about them as possible. Steifflomeis said far too much and by that action, among others, helped to create this situation. Perhaps we should have killed you straight away. We had a number of opportunities. But we were both curious and delayed things for too long. We were both, in our ways, fascinated by you. As you can see, we let your personality assume too much control over us."

"We must do something," Faustaff told her gently.

"I agree. Let's go back to the house first and talk it over."

"What about all these others?"

"We can't do much for them—they're confused, but they'll be all right for a while."

Outside the movie lot stood the small truck in which Steifflomeis had obviously brought his followers. Faustaff's car stood near it. In it a naked girl tugged at the doors and hammered on the window. Seeing them, she began to wind the window down.

"What the hell's going on?" she asked in a harsh, East Side New York accent. "Is this a kidnapping or something? Where am I?"

Faustaff unlocked the door and let her out.

"Jesus!" she said. "What is it—a nudist colony? I want my clothes."

Faustaff pointed back at the main gate of the lot. "You'll find some in there," he told her.

She looked up at the S-D-K sign. "You're making a movie? Or is this one of those Hollywood parties I've heard about?"

Faustaff chuckled. "With a figure like that you *ought* to be in pictures. Go and see if anyone spots you."

She sniffed and began to walk towards the gate.

Gordon Ogg and Nancy got into the back seats and Maggy White climbed in beside Faustaff as he started the car, turned it neatly in the street and drove towards downtown L.A.

People were wandering about everywhere, many of them still in their ritual costumes. They looked puzzled and a bit dazed. They were arguing and talking among themselves. There didn't seem to be much trouble; nobody looked afraid. There were a few cars on the road and sometimes a group of people would wave to him to stop as he passed, but he just waved back with a grin.

Everything seemed funny to him now. He realised that he was his old self again and wondered how and where he had started to lose his sense of humour.

Faustaff noticed, as he passed the spot, that the Time Dump had vanished and the anachronisms were gone, too. Everything looked fairly normal.

He asked Maggy White about it.

"Those things are automatically eradicated," she told him. "If they don't fit the pattern then the simulation can't work smoothly until everything is rationalised. The pre-activation process gets rid of anything like that. Since it's been interrupted, perhaps a few anachronisms will continue to exist. I don't know. It hasn't happened before on any large scale. It's like anything else, you see. The apparatus can't be tested thoroughly until it is tried out on whatever it was designed for. This is another function of the pre-activation process."

The house, in which they'd travelled from E-3 to E-Zero, was still there and so was the cathedral, visible behind it.

Faustaff had a thought. He dropped the other three at the house and drove round to the cathedral. Even before he opened the door he heard shouting echoing around inside the building.

There was Orelli, still nailed to the cross. But he was far from tranquil. His face was twisted in pain.

"Faustaff!" he said hoarsely as the professor approached. "What happened to me? What am I doing here?"

Faustaff found a candlestick that could probably be used to get the nails out.

"This is going to be painful, Orelli," he said.

"Get me down. It couldn't be any more painful."

Faustaff began to lever the nails from Orelli's flesh. He took the man in his arms and laid him on the altar. He moaned in agony.

"I'll get you back to the house," Faustaff said, picking up the ex-cardinal. "There'll probably be dressings of some kind there."

Orelli was weeping as Faustaff carried him out to the car. Faustaff felt that it wasn't the pain that was making Orelli weep, it was probably the memory of the dream he had only recently awakened from.

Driving away from the cathedral, Faustaff decided that it would be better to go to the nearest hospital. Presumably it would be equipped with antibiotics and medicated gauze.

It took him a quarter of an hour to find a hospital. He went into its empty hall and through to the emergency rooms. In a big medical chest he found everything he wanted and began to treat Orelli.

By the time he had finished, the ex-cardinal was asleep from the sedative he had administered.

Faustaff took him to a bed and tucked him in.

Orelli would be all right for a while, he decided.

He drove back to the house, parked the car and went inside. Maggy White, Gordon Ogg and Nancy were sitting in the living room, drinking coffee and eating sandwiches.

The scene seemed so normal as to be incongruous. Faustaff told them what he had done with Orelli and sat down to have some food and coffee.

As they finished and Faustaff lit cigarettes for himself and Nancy, Maggy White seemed to come to a decision.

"We could use the machinery in this house to get to the principals," she said thoughtfully. "Would you like me to take you to them, Faustaff?"

"Wouldn't that be going against your instructions?"

"It is the best thing I can think of. I can't do anything else now."

"Naturally I'd like to contact your principals," Faustaff nodded. He now began to feel excited. "Though at this stage I can't see any way of sorting out the mess that everything's in. Do you know how many of the other simulations still exist?"

"No. Perhaps they have all been destroyed by now."

Faustaff sighed. "Their efforts and mine both appear to have been wasted."

"I'm not sure," she said. "Let's see. We'd have to leave your friends behind."

"Do you mind?" Faustaff asked them. They shook their heads. "Perhaps you could go and make sure Orelli's all right," Faustaff suggested. He told them where the hospital was. "I know how we all felt towards him, but he's paid a big enough price, I think. I don't think you'll hate him when you see him. I'm not sure his sanity will survive even now."

"Okay," Nancy said, getting up. "I hope you'll get back soon, Fusty. I want to see more of you."

"It's mutual," he smiled. "Don't worry. Goodbye, Gordon." He shook hands with Ogg. "See you!"

They left the house.

Faustaff followed Maggy White into the other room where the equipment was.

"There's just one button to press," she told him. "But it only works for Steifflomeis or me. I'd have used it before if I could have got the house to myself, but I got diverted—I had to stay to see what you did." She reached out and pressed the button.

The walls of the house seemed to change colour, rapidly going through the whole spectrum; they seemed to flow in on Faustaff, covering him with soft light, then they flattened out.

They stood on a vast plateau roofed by a huge, dark dome. Light came from all sides, the colours merging to become a white that was not really white, but a visible combination of all colours.

And giants looked down on them. They were human, with calm, ascetic features, completely naked and hairless. They were seated in simple chairs that did not appear to have any real substance and yet supported them perfectly.

They were about thirty feet high, Faustaff judged.

"My principals," Maggy White said.

"I'm glad to meet you at last," Faustaff told them. "You seem to be in some sort of dilemma."

"Why have you come here?" One of the giants spoke. His voice did not seem in proportion to his size. It was quiet and well-modulated, without emotion.

"To make a complaint, among other things," said Faustaff. He felt that he should be overawed by the giants, but perhaps all the experiences that had led up to this meeting had destroyed any sense of wonder he might have had otherwise. And he felt the giants had bungled too much to deserve a great deal of respect from him.

Maggy White was explaining everything that had happened. When she finished, the giants got up and walked through the walls of light. Faustaff sat down on the floor. It felt hard and cold and it made the parts of his body that touched it feel as if they had received a slight local

anaesthetic. Its constant changing of colour didn't help him to feel any more comfortable.

"Where have they gone?" he asked Maggy.

"To debate what I have told them," she said. "They shouldn't be long."

"Are you ready to tell me who they actually are?"

"Let them tell you," she said. "I'm sure they will."

twenty

Conversation with the Principals

THE PRINCIPALS SOON returned. When they had seated themselves one of them spoke.

"There is a pattern to everything," he said. "But everything makes the pattern. The human failing is to make patterns out of parts of the whole and call it the whole. Time and Space has a pattern, but you see only a few elements on your simulations. Our science reveals the full dimensions and enables us to create the simulations."

"I understand that," said Faustaff. "But why do you create the simulations in the first place."

"Our ancestors evolved on the original planet many millions of years ago. When their society had developed to the necessary point, they set off to explore the universe and understand it. Approximately ten thousand of your years ago we returned to the planet of our origin, having mapped and studied the universe and learned all its fundamental principles. We found that the society that had produced us had decayed. We expected that of course. But what we had scarcely realised was the extent to which we ourselves had been physically changed by our journeyings. We are immortals, in the sense that we shall exist until the end of the current phase of the universe. This knowledge has altered our psychology, naturally. In your terms we have become superhuman but we feel this as a loss rather than an accomplishment. We decided to attempt to reproduce the civilisation that had produced us.

"There were a few primitive inhabitants left on the Earth, which had long-since begun a metamorphosis into

an altered chemical state. We revitalised the planet, giving it an identical nature to the one it had had when civilisation first began to exist in any real form. We expected the inhabitants to react to this. We expected—and there was no cause then to expect otherwise—to develop a race which would rapidly achieve an identical civilisation to the one which had created us. But the first experiment failed—the inhabitants stayed on the same level of barbarism that they had been on when we first found them, but they began to fight one another. We decided to create an entirely new planet and try again. So as not to alter the balance of the universe, we extended a kind of 'well' into what you call, I believe, 'subspace', and built our new planet there. This proved a failure, but we learnt from it. Since then we have built more than a thousand simulations of the original Earth and have gradually been adding to our understanding of the complexity of the project we undertook. Everything on every planet has a part to play. A building, a tree, an animal, a man. All link in as essentials to the structure. They have a physical rôle to play in the ecological and sociological nature of the planet, and they have a psychological rôle—a symbolic nature. That is why we find it useful to have the populace of every new simulation (which is drawn from previous abandoned simulations) externalise and dramatise its symbolic and psychological rôle before full activation. To some extent it is also therapeutic and in many ways has the effect of simulating the birth and childhood of the adults we use. You doubtless noticed that there were no children on the new simulation. We find children very difficult to use on a freshly activated world."

"But why all those simulations?" Faustaff said. "Why not one planet which you could—judging by what you do anyway—brainwash *en masse* and channel it the way you want to."

"We are trying to produce an identical evolutionary pattern to the one which produced us. It would be impractical to do as you suggest. The psychological accretions would build-up too rapidly. We need a fresh environment every time. All this was considered before we began work on the first simulation."

"And why don't you interfere directly with the worlds? Surely you could destroy them as easily as you create them."

"They are not easily created and are not easily destroyed. We dare not let a hint of our presence get to the simulations. We did not exist when our ancestors evolved, therefore no-one should guess we exist now. We use our androids for destroying the failed simulations, or, for more sophisticated work, we use near-humans like the one who brought you here. They seem to be human and the natural assumption, if their activities are discovered and their missions fail, is that they are employed by other human beings. It is a very delicate kind of experiment, since it involves complicated entities like yourself, and we cannot afford, normally, to interfere directly. We do not want to become gods. Religion has a function in a society's earliest stages, but that function is soon replaced by the sciences. To provide what would be to your people 'proof' of supernatural beings would be completely against our interest."

"What of the people you kill? Have you no moral attitude to that?"

"We kill very few. Normally the population of one simulation is transferred to another. Only the children are destroyed in any quantity."

"*Only* the children!"

"I understand your horror. I understand your feelings towards children. It is necessary that you should have them—it is a virtue when you have these feelings in any strength—in your terms. In our terms, the whole race is our children. Compare our destruction of your immature offspring to your own destruction of male sperm and female ovum in preventing birth. Your feelings are valid. We have no use for such feelings. Therefore, to us they are invalid."

Faustaff nodded. "I can see that. But I *have* these feelings. Besides which, I think there is a flaw in your argument. We feel that it is wrong to expect our children to develop as duplicates of ourselves. This defeats progress in any sense."

"We are not seeking progress. There is no progress to

be made. We know the fundamental principles of everything. We are immortal, we are secure."

Faustaff frowned for a moment and then asked, "What are your pleasures?"

"Pleasures?"

"What makes you laugh, for instance?"

"We do not laugh. We would know joy—fulfilment—if our experiment were to be successful."

"So, currently, you have no pleasures. Nothing sensual or intellectual?"

"Nothing."

"Then you are dead, in my terms," Faustaff said. "Forget about the simulations. Can't you see that all your energies have been diverted into a ridiculous, useless experiment? Let us develop as we will—or destroy ourselves if we must. Let me take the knowledge you have given me back to E-Zero and tell everyone of your existence. You have kept them in fear, you have allowed them to despair, you have, in certain directions, kept them in ignorance. Turn your attention to yourselves—look for pleasure, create things to give you pleasure. Perhaps in time you would succeed in reproducing this Golden Age you speak of—but I doubt it. Even if you did, it would be a meaningless achievement, particularly if the eventual result was a race like yourselves. You have logic. Use it to find enjoyment in subjective pursuits A thing does not have to have meaning to be enjoyed. Where are your arts, your amusements, your entertainments?"

"We have none. We have no use for them."

"Find a use."

The giant rose. His companions got up at the same time.

Once again they left the place and Faustaff waited, assuming they were debating what he had said.

They returned eventually.

"There is a possibility that you have helped us," said the giant as he and his companions seated themselves.

"Will you agree to let E-Zero develop without interference?" Faustaff asked.

"Yes. And we shall allow the remaining subspacial simulations to exist. There is one condition."

"What's that?"

"Our first illogical act—our first—joke—will be to have all the thirteen remaining simulations existing together in ordinary space-time. What influence this will in time have on the structure of the universe we cannot guess, but it will bring an element of uncertainty into our lives and thus will help us in our quest for pleasures. We shall have to enlarge your sun and replace the other planets in your system, for the thirteen worlds will constitute a much larger mass since we visualise them as being close together and easily accessible to one another. We feel that we shall be creating something that has no great practical use, within the limited sense of the word, but which will be pleasing and unusual to the eye. It will be the first thing of its kind in the universe."

"You certainly work fast," Faustaff smiled. "I'm looking forward to the result."

"No physical danger will result from what we do. It will be—spectacular, we feel."

"So it's over—you're abandoning the experiment altogether. I didn't think you'd be so easily convinced."

"You have released something in us. We are proud of you. By accident we helped create you. We are not abandoning the experiment, strictly speaking. We are going to let it run its own course from now on. Thank you."

"And thank you, gentlemen. How do I get back?"

"We will return you to E-Zero by the usual method."

"What about Maggy White?" Faustaff said, turning towards the girl.

"She will stay with us. She might be able to help us."

"Goodbye, then, Maggy," Faustaff kissed her on the cheek and squeezed her arm.

"Goodbye," she smiled.

The walls of light began to flow inwards, enfolding Faustaff. Soon they took on the shape of the room in the house.

He was back on E-Zero. The only difference was that the equipment had vanished. The room looked completely normal.

He went to the front door Gordon Ogg and Nancy White were coming up the path.

"Good news," he grinned, walking towards them. "I'll tell you all about it. We've got a lot of work to do to help everybody organise themselves."

twenty-one

The Golden Bridges

BY THE TIME the principals were ready to create their "joke", the populations of the subspacial worlds had been informed of everything Faustaff could tell them. He had been interviewed for the press, given television and radio time, and there had been no questioning voices. Somehow, all he said struck the worlds' populations as being true. It explained what they saw around them, what they felt within them.

The time came, and everyone was ready for it, when the thirteen planets began to phase in to ordinary space-time.

Faustaff and Nancy were back in Los Angeles when it happened, standing in the garden of the house which had first brought them to E-Zero and where they now lived. It was night when the twelve other simulations made their appearance. The dark sky seemed to ripple gently and they were there; a cluster of worlds moving in unison through space, with E-Zero in the centre, like so many gigantic moons.

Faustaff recognised the green jungle world of E-12; the desert-sea world of E-3. There was the vast continental atoll that was the only land area on E-7; the more normal-seeming worlds of E-2 and E-4; the mountainous world of E-11.

Now Faustaff received the impression that the sky was *flowing* and he realised that, miraculously the atmospheres of the Earth-simulations were merging to form a complete envelope around the world-cluster. Now the jungle world could supply oxygen to the worlds with less vegetation, and moisture would come from the worlds predominantly of water.

He saw E-1, as he craned his neck to see them all. It seemed covered by black and scarlet clouds. It was right,

he felt, that it should have been included; a symbol of ignorance and fear, a symbol of what the idea of hell actually meant in physical terms. The atmosphere did not seem to extend to E-1, for though its presence was necessary, it had been isolated.

Faustaff realised that though the principals had made a joke, it was a joke with many points to it.

"I hope they don't get too earnest about this now," Nancy said, hugging Faustaff's arm.

"I don't think they're going to be earnest for long," he smiled. "Just serious maybe. A good joke needs a spot of everything." He shook his head in wonderment. "Look at it all. It's impossible in our scientific terms, but they've done it. I've got to hand it to them; when they decide to be illogical, they go the whole hog!"

Nancy pointed into the sky. "Look," she said. "What's happening now?"

There was a further movement in the sky. Other objects began to appear; great golden structures whose reflected light turned the night to near-day; arcs of flame, bridges of light between the worlds. Faustaff shielded his eyes to peer at them. They ran from world to world, spanning the distances like fiery rainbows. Only E-1 was not touched by them.

"That's what they are," Faustaff said in realisation. "They're bridges—bridges that we can cross to reach the other simulations. See—" he pointed to an object that hung in the sky above their heads, rapidly passing as the world turned on its axis—"there's one end of ours. We could reach it in a plane, then we could walk across, if we had a lifetime to spare! But we can build transport that will cross the bridges in a few days! These worlds are like islands in the same lake, and those bridges link us all together."

"They're very beautiful," said Nancy quietly.

"Aren't they!"

Faustaff laughed in pleasure at the sight and Nancy joined in.

They were still laughing when the sun rose, a massive, splendid sun that made Faustaff realise that he had never really known daylight until that moment.

The giant sun's rays caught the gold of the bridges so that they flamed even more brilliantly.

Used now to the code in which the principals had tried to write the history of his race, Faustaff looked at the bridges and understood the many things they meant; to him, to the worlds and to the men, women and children who must now all be looking up at them.

And in its isolation, E-1 glared luridly in the new daylight.

Faustaff and Nancy turned to look at it. "There's no need to fear that now, Nancy," he said to her. "We can start getting somewhere at last, as long as we remember to relax a bit. Those bridges mean understanding; communication . . ."

Nancy nodded seriously. Then she looked up at Faustaff and her expression turned into a spreading grin. She winked at him. He grinned and winked back.

They went into the house and were soon rolling about in bed together.

THE END

EDITORIAL—*continued from page* 4

as the literary form best suited to making full use of the new prism.

The writers we have selected for you in this first issue of 1966 are all, in their very different ways, signposting some of the directions which we feel sf will take in the near future.

Michael Moorcock

PETER REDGROVE

THE CASE

For Roy Hart

> Clinic Director: "This is schizophrenia. The boy was close to his mother: a widow after a very unsatisfactory marriage. His illness, which must always have been latent, accelerated when she died. . . . He suffers also from an hysterical blindness, and cannot open his eyes. They have remained shut for the ten years of his illness. . . . He likes to spend his time in the garden and likes also to be called 'Father'. He never replies when he is so called, but only smiles a little, and turns away. . . . I have often noticed that such cases seem unwilling to be cured. . . ."

I am a gardener,
A maker of trials, flowers, hypotheses.
I water the earth.
I raise perfumes there.
Mother told me to stand, and I did so,
Stepping towards the window in which she sat.
"Now, did you find him, your other half?
And mine," she said, and I shook my head:
"No, my time is so short and I'll take no oath."
"You've just taken one, by standing,
My dear one," she said, and she told me how the stars
Had said as much, and I concurred and saw
How the crystalware of the polished table,

The cabinets of glass things walling the room,
The tall roses beyond the glass, the gloss of the table,
Had said as much in sunshine from my first tottering.
So she lifted my hand and kissed it and said I was to be celibate,
And this was great good fortune and I was a good child
For I had a quest and few had as much.
The roses nodded.

So I became a gardener,
A maker of prayers, flowers, hypotheses.
A gardener "washed in my fertile sweat,"
My hair of an opulent brown "like the Lord's,
That makes you think of fertile fields."
And among the flowers, in the walled garden, "This is life!" she cried,
"What a shame, oh what a shame," she said,
"What a shame we have to die," she cried, all
The flowers pumping their natures into her, and plumping
Into her nostrils, winged wide, she leaning,
Leaning back, breathing deeply, blushing deeply,
Face shining and deep breath and tall brick
Holding the air still and the heat high in a tall room.

And I swam in the thunderstorm in the river of blood, oil and cider,
And I saw the blue of my recovery open around me in the water,
Blood, cider, rainbow, and the apples still warm after sunset
Dashed in the cold downpour, and so this mother-world
Opened around me and I lay in the perfumes after rain out of the river
Tugging the wet grass, eyes squeezed, straining to the glory,

The burst of white glory like the whitest clouds rising to the sun

And it was like a door opening in the sky, it was like a door opening in the water,
It was like the high mansion of the sky, and water poured from the tall french windows.
It was like a sudden smell of fur among the flowers, it was like a face at dusk
It was like a rough trouser on a smooth leg. Oh, shame,
It was the mother-world wet with perfume. It was something about God.
And she stood there and I wanted to tell her something and she was gone.
It was something about God. She stood smiling on the wet verge
And she waited for me to tell her but she was gone.
And three gusts of hot dry air came almost without sound
Through the bushes, and she went. Through the bushes
Of blown and bruised roses. And she went. And the bushes were blown
And the gusts were hot, dry air, nearly black with perfume,
Alive with perfume. Oh shame. It was like an announcement,
Like an invitation, an introduction, an invitation, a quick smile in the dusk.
It was like a door opening on a door of flowers that opened on flowers that were opening.
It was like the twist of a rosy fish among lily-pads that were twisting on their deep stems.
The rosy goldfish were there in the dusky pond, but she was gone.
It was something about God. My hand made a wet door in the water

And I thought of something I knew about God. My mother
Stared at me from the pool over my shoulder and when I turned she was gone.
Then the wind blew three hot dry gusts to me through the broken rose-bushes
And she came to me dusky with perfume and I walked towards her
And through her, groping for her hand. And it was something about God.
And I searched in my head for it with my eyes closed. But it was gone.

And I became a gardener, a hypothesiser, one who would consult his sensations,
For "we live in sensations and where there are none there is no life,"
One with the birds that are blue-egged because they love the sky!
With the flocks of giraffes craning towards the heavens!
With the peacocks dressed in their love for the high sun
And in their spectra of the drifting rains, one
With the great oaks in my keeping that stretched up to touch God!
And one who could look up gladly and meet God's gaze,
His wide blue gaze, through my blood, as I think ;
And God was silent and invisible and I loved him for it,
I loved him for his silent invisibility, for his virile restraint,
And I was one with my peacocks that sent out their wild cry
Sounding like shrill "help!" and meaning no such thing,
While my flocks of deer wrote love in their free legs
Their high springy haunches and bounding turf. And they would pause

And look upwards, and breathe through wide nostrils, and all day
It was wide and firm and in God's gaze and open: tussock and turf, long lake,
Reed-sigh, silence and space, pathway and flower furnace
Banked up and breathing.

And the people. And the causeway into the walled garden.
And the people walking in so slowly, on their toes
Through the wide doorway, into the cube of still air,
Into the perspective of flowers, following each other in groups,
Gazing around, "Oh, what shame, to die!" and the great doorway
And ourselves, smiling, and standing back, and they changed,
Concentrated, concentrating, at the edges of the body, the rims
Tighter, clearer, by the sensations of their bodies, solidified, bound,
Like the angels, the bodies' knowledge of the flowers inbound
Into its tightening and warming at the heart of flowers, the fire called
"Then-shall-ye-see-and-your-heart-shall-rejoice—
And-your-bones-shall-sprout-as-the-blade. . . ."

And she was gone. And she lay down like the earth after rain.
It was love-talk in every grain. And something about God.
The brick walls creaked in the wind, grain to grain.
And judgement came as the father comes, and she is gone.
Clouds swoop under the turf into the pond, the peacock cries

"Help!" strutting in its aurora, love talks
Grain to grain, gossiping about judgement, his coming. Ranges
Tumble to boulders that rattle to shingles that ease to wide beaches
That flurry to dust that puffs to new dusts that dust
To dusting dust, all talking, all
Gossiping of glory, and there are people
In the gardens, in white shirts, drifting,
Gossiping of shame through the gardens. "Oh glory!"

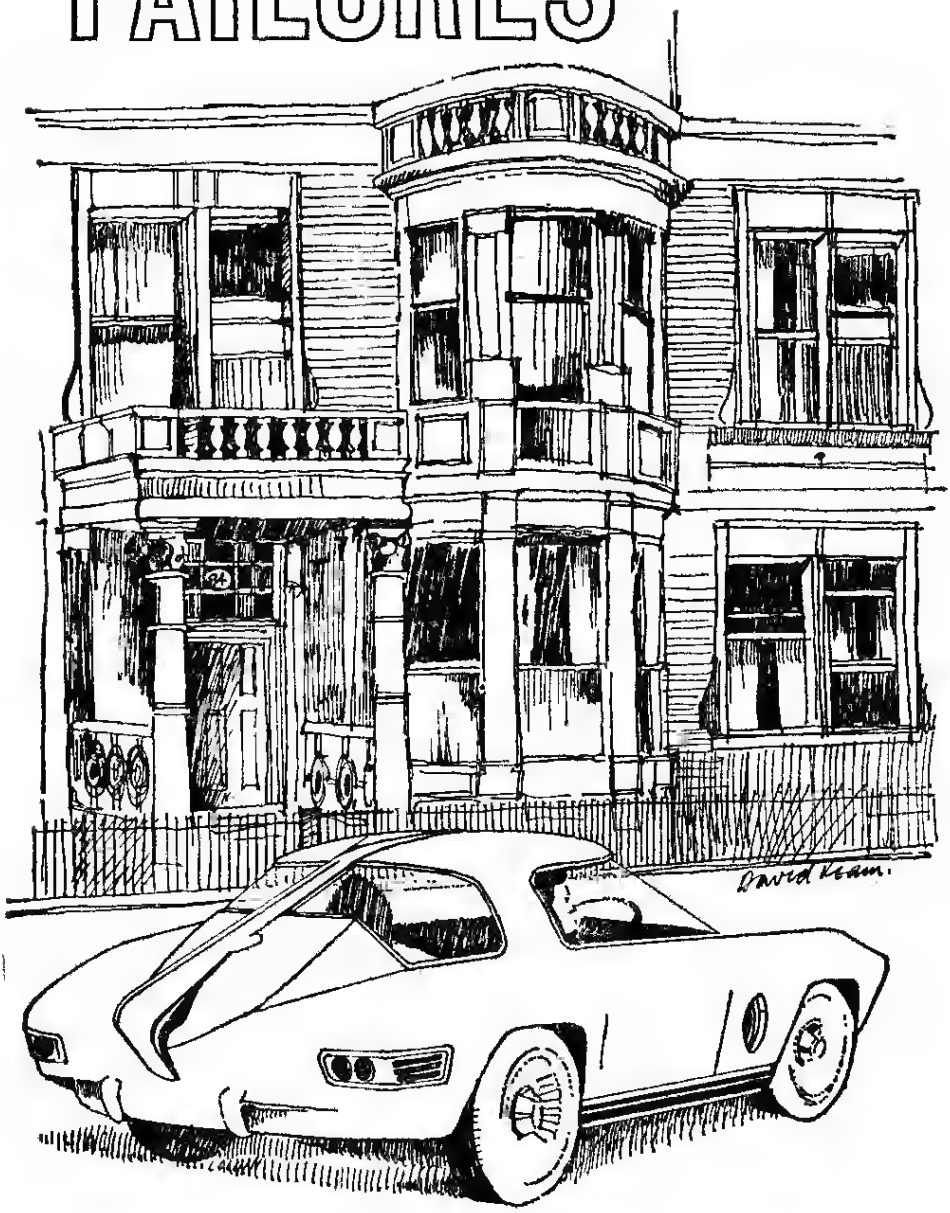
Through the gardens. . . . Well, father, is that how you come?
Come then.
Whose breath is it that flares through the shrubberies?
Whose breath that returns? Look at the people
All ageing to judgement, all
Agreeing to judgement. Look at that woman
Still snuffing up the flowers. My mother!
Look at her. She bends backwards to the tall flowers, falls.
Her flower-laden breath returns to the skies.
I think this garden is a prayer,
Shall I burn it as an offering?
And I think these people are a prayer,
I think they are a message.
Shall I burn them for their syllable?
There is a fire crying "shame!" here already!
It mixes dying with flowering.
I think we husk out uttering. I think
We tip it out. Our perfect syllable,
Tripped out over the death-bed, a one,
Round, perfectly-falling silence.
Look how they seek the glory over these flowers!

I wanted to say something about God,
My syllable about God. I think
We are a prayer. I think
He wants his breath back, unhusked
Of all the people, our dying silences,
Our great involuntary promise
Unhusked, flying out into the rain, over the battlefields,
Switching through shrubberies, into the sky. . . .

You press, oh God!
You press on me as I press on an eyeball,
You press sunsets and autumns and dying flowers,
You press lank ageing people in gardens "Oh shame
To die," you press roses and matchflames like wisps of your fingers,
Your great sun cuffs age at us. I will bring,
I will bring you in, father, through the bounds of my senses,
Face to face, father, through the sockets of my head,
Haul you in, father, through my eyes with my fingers,
Into my head through my eyes, father, my eyes, oh my eyes. . . .

To live in the blind sockets, the glorious blunt passages,
Tended by gardeners, nostril, eye, mouth,
Bruised face in a white shirt ageing,
To be called "Father" and to hear call high
"Oh shame, what a shame, to die" as they see the great flowers,
To hear the peacock "help!" that means no such thing,
And to live unseeing, not watching, without judging, called "Father".

THE FAILURES



CHARLES PLATT

"HOW LONG DID it take you to work out the number?" the journalist asked.

Greg answered mechanically, his eyes on a blonde girl across the room "We did it after a one-niter in Newcastle," he said. "In the van on the way back."

The journalist looked down his question list. His audio-video recorder hummed quietly, green eye glowing. The murmur of conversation in the room surrounded them.

"What are your future plans for the Ephemerals?"

"Didn't catch what you said . . ." Over by the exit, the girl was putting on her coat.

"Future plans for the group."

"Some other time, sorry . . ." Greg pushed his way through the crowd of people at the Press party, trying to reach the door. He caught her just as she was about to walk out.

"You're Cathy. Cathy Grant."

She turned, looked at him. She was right In—the restrained, natural look of '76, the blended cosmetics so discreet as to be virtually indetectable. Her hair was short in front, long down the back, a rich yellow-gold with elusive shimmers of mauve when it moved.

"How did you know?"

"It wasn't hard to find out. Saw you at a dance last week, you left just before I did." He paused a moment. "My name's Greg, you know?"

"I know."

"Can I drive you home?" His fingers touched the textured plastic of her coat sleeve. She fluttered her eyelashes parodying modesty.

"You're too kind."

They walked down to the street. The car was a U.S. import: turbine powered, sleek, ostentatiously expensive without being too extrovert, smooth and restrained styling. He opened the nearside door for her, the roof section flipped up for her to enter. The seat swivelled back as the door shut. He walked round to the other side and sat down in the driver's seat.

The engine started with a tuned roar that echoed off the buildings. Greg selected manual control and eased out into the traffic flow.

"Smooth, isn't it?" he said.

"It's very nice."

He turned sharp left, tyres squealing, banged his foot hard down. The sports car accelerated to sixty down the side street, the exhaust note rising to a scream. Greg braked hard, turned into the Park Lane traffic, up towards the Marble Arch flyover. It was evening; lights on cars and trucks blinked red and white and amber in the twilight.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Hampstead."

He flipped on the car radio; music filled the interior. He laughed. "Hell, they're playing our new number."

"You're doing all right, aren't you?" she said.

"Meaning?"

"Your group hits a new sound, starts a new movement, gets to the top in a rush. You're in with the right people, get the right clothes and the right cars, riding high . . ."

"I'm doing well for myself."

"Do you pick up most girls as easily as you picked me up?"

He glanced at her. Their eyes met. "Yes," he said.

They were silent for a moment. The music on the radio ended.

"That's it!" the DJ cried hysterically. "That's *IT!* You haven't got it, then you've got to get it, what a *fantastic* sound, the tomorrow hit from the Ephemerals, the one all you tomorrow people are buying! And girls—while you're in your local music merchant's next, grab a pack of Allure—Allure, for confidence, for subtly enhanced attractiveness! Unlike other eyeglitter brands, Allure can be used with security. It will not impair the natural lubrication your eyes need. It provides that added sexy sparkle, but it's tested medically safe! It's instant, you're out without it . . ."

Cathy reached out and turned the noise off.

"If you want the music, you've got to have the plugs," Greg said.

"Then I'd rather not have the music."

"It's your duty to consume . . ." he laughed. "One day they'll make it a law, just wait and see . . ."

They soared over the flyover, headlights flooding the

road ahead. The moon hung low and red in the haze and smoke of the atmosphere; near it was a bright dot, the Russian orbital station, left unmanned after the space drain.

Greg pulled into the passing lane, and the cars and lights flashed by. The only noise was the rumble of the sports car's turbine; the thick upholstery and padding cut out the roar of the traffic outside completely.

"The night's just beginning, how about a dinner date?" he said. "There's a place half an hour away, country scenery, by the river . . ."

"Sorry, Greg, I'm busy this evening. A lift home was what you offered."

"Hell, Cathy . . ."

"Take me home please."

He filtered off the motorway, roared down an underpass and into the traffic-clogged narrow backstreets. They overtook other vehicles, shot across two red-light junctions, headlights glaring defiantly.

"In a hurry, Greg?" she said. "Or trying to prove something?"

"I enjoy driving fast."

"Why?"

"It gives me a kick, why else?"

She smiled. "That's as good an answer as any, I suppose."

"Where to, in Hampstead?" he asked.

"Up Fitzjohns Avenue—near the top, on the right. It's a new block." He went more slowly up the broad road, lined by large, tall mansions now mostly converted into apartments, fitted with high-speed elevators, picture windows and air conditioners. They stopped opposite a five-story building in glittering polished white concrete.

She reached for the door handle; he leant across and touched her hand. His fingers caressed her arm, under her coat sleeve. He twisted round in his seat and touched her cheek with his left hand, fingers brushing her hair. Soft. He drew her to him, conscious of her scent, the rustle of her clothes, the quietly idling car engine and the rumble of traffic passing. Their lips touched moist as they kissed, her hand on his shoulder holding him to her. Her face was

lit from one side by the street lamps, her eyes were open and staring into his.

They broke gently apart.

"Do you always kiss with your eyes open?" he said.

"Do you?" she said, smiling a little. She opened the door ; the traffic noise wafted in with the cool evening air. The light over the car door shimmered in her hair.

"I'll call you tomorrow," he said.

"Yes, call me tomorrow, Greg." She got out of the car. "Thank you for the transport." She slammed the door. He watched while she walked across the road to the apartment block, into the door at the bottom. He rubbed the finger and thumb of his left hand together, absent-mindedly ; where he had touched her cheek, pink cosmetic had transferred to his skin.

Then he U-turned in the road and accelerated back down the hill. He snapped the radio on again ; instant music bathed him. He notched the climate-control heater up a step. The car was a private world, smooth, flying, effortless, all his own. The vehicles parked at the side of the road flashed past behind him, he settled into the contour seat and gripped the steering firmly, and thought, hell, *this* was living!

Cathy undressed looking out of the window. The sky was dark, the city lights scattered out into the haze, glittering. The air conditioner hummed and its faint breeze touched her body, cool.

In the corner of the room the little monkey chattered at her, biting his chain. She walked over across the thick white carpet, pulled a grape from a bunch on the table, and fed it to him.

"You can't be hungry," she said. "You just want attention, that's all." The monkey ate half the grape and dropped the rest, jumping up and down chattering, showing yellow teeth. Cathy laughed and stroked the furry top of his head ; at once the animal quietened. "You're cute," she said. "But I have other things to do."

She walked back to the other side of the room, slid open the wardrobe, ran her hand along the line of summer

dresses. They shimmered in the soft room lighting, a spectrum of coloured fabric.

Impulsively she turned away and dropped down on to the white-quilted bed, rolling over face down. When, she wondered, would the luxury of the good life become monotonous? Anyone could see the pleasures were shallow, anyone could tell her it was really transitory and worthless. She knew that. But when would she find she'd had enough? You could live a long time in soft luxury without becoming satiated.

The doorview chimed. She clicked on the viewer, saw it was Graham, her evening date, arrived already. She drapped the quilt around her before turning the downstairs screen on.

"Hello, Cathy—am I very early?" he said.

"No, I've been daydreaming," she replied, noting his immaculate appearance as she glanced at his image on the screen. She pressed the door-open button. "You can come up and wait in the living room. I won't be long."

"You can come down as you are, if you like," he replied. She put the receiver back in its cradle and turned off the picture.

That was when one tired of it all; when the novelty had gone, when each sophisticated, well-dressed, successful man said the same things in the same boring way, no matter how polished a conversationalist. When each one somehow seemed the same as all the rest of his sex. As she took an expensive pink and white patterned dress off its hanger, she thought fleetingly of Greg. There, at least, was freshness and novelty, someone who was enjoying life too much to get tired of it.

Later that evening, the Ephemerals performed at the Beat Forum. It was on the top floor of an office block, a converted store room. The walls were of unfinished concrete, bare and stark, discoloured. The ceiling was a matt black, low over the heads of the crowd packed around the centrally placed stage. Two spotlights shone down vertically on the performers; otherwise the wide, claustrophically low room was lit only by dim red and blue neon tubes running around the walls.

It was a drab, characterless room; every night it shook to the pounding excitement of the music, enjoyed a brief period of life and awareness. The rest of the time it was left empty and dead.

By midnight, when the group was scheduled to appear, the place was packed, hot, sticky, oppressive. Recorded music, emanating in great rolling stereophonic waves from the loudspeakers around the dancing area, faded out as the compere appeared on stage.

"No introduction needed from me," he said. "It's the group that started their success story here, fastest thing to hit the scene this decade. Here, with their authentic, gimmick-free act, the Ephemerals."

Greg and the group came on and started well, playing an old Lennon-McCartney number. He clutched the microphone in sticky, sweaty hands; he shook with the rhythm and opened himself up to the crescendoes. His voice shouted back overpoweringly at him from all around; the spots dazzled him until he was singing in a groping world of noise and pounding hysteria. The baritone saxes roared, the organ screamed, the voice and song flooded out of him as if it were all of him and all of the world. Through half-closed eyes he saw the sea of faces stretching back from the stage into the semi-darkness, felt raised up by the powerful pounding beat, high and good.

The number ended and they went straight into another. He tingled with exhilaration, the floor trembling under his feet, and sweat ran down his forehead. He felt wonderful as he sang, seven feet tall, knowing the group was good, knowing they were successes, knowing he was idolised . . .

The sound blasted over the people packed around the stage: young, plain-faced girls, teens and pre-teens living the music. Negroes danced and tomorrow-kids in one-niter suits slumped against the walls, blocked on the latest in pill-stimulants.

At the end of their act, after their last number, Greg pushed his way out through the crowd, feeling the hands of some of the girls clutching at him, his ears singing from the noise of the music, his clothes sticking wet and clammy to his skin. He felt an odd kind of euphoria, the world around seemed somehow disconnected from him.

He and the rest of the group sat around in the dressing-room, amidst photographers and pressmen, while their instruments were loaded into their van in the street below. Then they left the club, splitting up, Greg going back to his Kensington apartment. His mind was buzzing, he felt exhausted yet awake and aware, vital and alive. He lay down on his bed still wearing his stage clothes, and sleep hit him without him realising it.

Sunlight bathed the white net curtains. The richly furnished apartment lay in the diffuse morning glow from the window.

Greg awoke. His limbs were stiff and heavy, his head ached slightly. He peered at his watch, found it was almost ten. He yawned and stretched, swung his feet off the bed, rubbed sleep from his eyes. The sky was clear and blue ; it was going to be a good day.

After throwing off his wrinkled, sticky stage clothes and enjoying a hot shower, he dressed in a light summer outfit, and started looking through the morning mail.

It was mainly letters from fans, letters from people wanting to cash in on his success in some way, letters begging, letters threatening. On impulse he pushed them aside, sat down in front of the videophone, and dialled enquiries. He spelled out on the dial Cathy's second name ; the screen lit up at the appropriate directory page.

He noted the number, cleared the line, dialled it.

She was sitting at her dressing table, in her dressing gown. "Hello Greg," she said.

"I'm phoning like I said I would . . ."

"A man of his word."

"Yes, a man of my word. Hey, are you doing anything this afternoon?"

She raised her eyebrows. "Just like that?"

He grinned. "Just like that. Like, if I was to be outside your door at about 2.30, we'd be ready to go . . ."

"Where, Greg?"

"Where? Let's say, down to the river, out in the country, two tomorrow people . . ."

"Do you have to use that DJ slang?"

"Sorry, bad habits. Well?"

"Well, what?"

"I'll spell it out . . . is it a date?"

She laughed. "All right, I've nothing else to do this afternoon . . ."

"2.30, then."

She smiled and broke the connection. He stood up, put on his jacket, whistling. He brushed his hair, went out of the apartment slamming the door after him, and down to the street, taking the stairs two at a time. Outside in the street the sky was clear, the sunlight warm and happy. He enjoyed the surge of acceleration as he drove off down the road.

He lunched at a small Greek café near Kilburn ; he liked to eat there, because he could usually escape recognition, and because the food was good: real meat, home-baked bread. It was a small place, not very clean, and the workers from that area were usually the only people there. Tough, leathery old men, sitting over a sandwich and cup of tea ; women, plump from too many children, waiting to buy take-away bags of food from the counter: pies, sandwiches, anything cheap. These were the people left behind by the affluence spiral ; unskilled, often of sub-normal intelligence. In spite of their poverty, though, they possessed a certain natural assurance and equanimity that Greg almost envied. They came from a rigid, unchanging society ; people who had never known any state other than poverty and who accepted it as being their only way of life.

He picked Cathy up from outside her apartment building and they drove north out of London, through the traffic-clogged suburbs, out on to open country roads. The soft top of the sports car retracted, the breeze wafted around them and the car seemed almost to float along, the exhaust note carried away behind them. Cathy relaxed back in her seat and the wind caught her hair, tangling it and blowing it out behind her head.

"I'm glad you could come out, this afternoon, Cathy," Greg said.

"So am I. Thanks for inviting me, Greg."

"You know, I was surprised, in a way, when you said

you'd come. I guessed you'd be going to some high-fashion sophisticated cocktail party . . ."

"I've grown to hate high-fashion so-called sophisticated parties, thank you. It's been too long since I just plain went out into the sunshine and enjoyed it."

"How do you make a living?" Greg said. "Modelling?"

"I have a ridiculously rich and indulgent father," she replied flatly. Greg let the subject drop.

They crawled through the traffic-blocked village of Maldon, and down to the river. Greg had chosen this spot as a mooring for a small houseboat, a little way up river from a little lock where the gates were still of massive wooden planks, opened and closed by hand. They parked the sports car at the top of a little gravel path leading down to the boat. The river glittered in the sun.

"It's beautiful," Cathy said. "Untouched."

"I bought mooring rights on both banks some way along in either direction, just to keep it clear," Greg explained. Beside the houseboat was moored a small air-cushion launch ; he started taking the covers off it.

"We'll come back to the houseboat later," he said. "Let's make use of the sun first, all right? Ever tried water skiing?"

Later, after skimming the launch over the choppy water into the estuary in clouds of fine spray thrown up by the air-blast, after they'd dived into the cold water and sunbathed a little, then driven the launch flat out, exhilarated by the water rushing past and the sun casting rainbows in the fine spray, they sat quietly back on the river bank watching the shadows begin to lengthen.

"It's a good life, Greg," Cathy said. "Even if it won't last for ever."

"That's interview-talk: 'what are you going to do when the kids don't buy your song tapes any more? What about when you're a fallen idol?' "

"Yes, but have you ever really thought about it?"

"Why should I?"

"Perhaps you're afraid to."

"And perhaps I'm not. I know the business I'm in ; it

took a long while to break into it, and then it was really just luck, a matter of finding the right sound and playing wild beat at a time just when people started reviving the rhythm styles of the sixties. We're on the top of the beat revival, but I know better than you do that in a year, maybe even sooner, something else will sweep in. Unless we adapt to it really fast, we'll be out in the cold again. It's that kind of business, so I accept the fact. Why should I worry about it?"

"Because . . . because, it seems everyone's just rushing on blindly these days, not thinking of the future." She frowned. "It all goes back to the population explosion, I suppose. Consume more, produce more, turn the goods over faster, run to stay ahead . . . It shouldn't have to be like that, Greg."

"You talk too much," he said, and kissed her. They lay back in the grass on the bank, him lying half over her, the sun on his back. He was conscious of the softness of her, the taste of her lips . . .

A short while later, Cathy pulled away from him a little. "I forgot to tell you," she said. "I really have to be back home by nine."

"That early? What for?"

"I'm sorry, Greg, it's an appointment I can't break."

"You could have told me earlier on."

"I've said I'm sorry. It's been a wonderful afternoon, but I just have to get back."

"I see." He stood up. The sun was near the horizon; somehow, it suddenly seemed colder, the warmth gone from the air. "Then we'd better leave now," he said. He told himself, as he tied the launch to the bank and put the covers over it, that he couldn't expect to monopolise her time.

They didn't talk much on the way back. As soon as they were near London the traffic became very heavy, one continuous river of cars edging into the country, another headed in the opposite direction, people from the provinces seeking the night life of the city. The air stank of exhaust fumes, the progress forward was slow.

He stopped outside her building.

"I'm sorry, Greg. I can't invite you in."

"That's all right," he said expressionlessly.

"Don't be so surly," she said, getting out of the car.

"I'll phone you tomorrow," Greg called. She slammed the door shut, waved, and walked quickly into the apartment block entrance. He sat in the car, looking after her, chewing on his thumbnail.

He was still sitting there a short while later, when he saw a man in a raincoat, a thin, slight figure, walk across the road and into the same building.

Something about it raised Greg's suspicions. He got out of the car and hurried after the man. Inside the apartment block ground floor hall, a list of names showed Cathy resident on the top floor apartment. Greg glanced at the indicator above the elevator; it was moving from third to fourth floors up to the fifth. He checked back against the list. The fifth floor was the top.

He walked back to his car and sat down in it. All right, he thought to himself. So he's gone to see her. So what? But he couldn't shake off the illogical resentment he felt.

Over an hour later, Greg was still waiting patiently when he saw the man in the raincoat emerge from the building and walk off down the road. Not knowing quite what his motives were, not really understanding himself, he got out of the sports car, slammed the door and followed him.

The raincoated figure eventually disappeared into a pub a little way down a side street. Greg went in after him.

He stood in the doorway watching. The man bought himself a drink at the bar, then went and sat down in the corner. He was pale-faced, tense in his movements. His eyes shifted uneasily; he looked somehow neurotic and highly strung. Greg walked over and sat down opposite him at the table.

"How's Cathy?" Greg said conversationally. The pale-faced man looked up startled.

"Who are you?" he blurted out.

"If you want to know my name, it's Greg Anderson. I could ask you the same question."

"My name's Jamieson. Look, what is it? Do you know Cathy, or something?"

"Yes, though not very well. perhaps you know her better than I do."

"We--we're old friends," Jamieson said weakly. "That's all."

"Good friends?"

"Yes, if you like." He seemed to gather up his courage. "L . . . look, who are you, what right have you got to come around questioning . . .?"

"All right, all right. Apologies from my side, then. But she cut short our afternoon date so she could get back to see you. I reckon that gives me a right to know what's going on, that's all."

Jamieson was silent a moment. "I see," he said. "I can see your position. But you needn't worry, you know. She's a good, kind girl. Very kind. She won't hurt you." He paused. "I'm a married man, actually," he said, suddenly. Words and phrases seemed to bottle themselves up inside him, so that each sentence escaped with difficulty, as if breaking free from his lips. "Unhappy marriage. No good. Can't get a divorce. Cathy's all I've got."

"She is?"

"That's right, that's right, I see her now and then. As often as she'll let me, you might say. Wonderful person." He finished his drink, lit a cigarette. Greg noticed his hand-movements were somehow odd, awkward and shaky.

Jamieson saw Greg notice his awkwardness. He smiled as if trying to conceal embarrassment. "I—haven't had an easy life," he said, suddenly off on another tangent. "I'm—crippled, you know. I was—was one of the—the first th-thalidomide babies." He banged his left arm with his right hand. There was the sound of metal-on-metal. "That's why I wear gloves, you see. Artificial arms."

Greg could think of nothing to say. He glanced up at Jamieson's white, pained face, then back at the table top.

"I went to university," Jamieson hurried on. "I'm sorry, I don't know why, I always end up telling people my life history. You *must think* me odd."

"No, it's all right, go ahead," Greg said. Jamieson looked grateful.

"My studies—they got on top of me. I had to throw it in."

"What were you studying?"

"Sociology. It—it was my thesis, the research, that got

too much for me." He gave a funny, high-pitched laugh. "Know what it was all about? I'll tell you. Do you realise that we're living in the only age in the history of man that has been able to feel population pressure as a tangible force? Affecting everyday life, the individual? People talked about it, in the sixties, but you couldn't *feel* it, like today. Synthesteaks. Plankton coming in. Food shortage. No houses. Think of it this way—the individual starts to feel the population explosion, the sheer pressure of people. Natural urge for procreation conflicting.

"Then the other aspect—the economic aspect. No more money left for anything but feeding people, no more labour, no nothing. Scientific research, abandoned in many fields. The space drain: we can't afford to go on progressing outwards, there's too many mouths to feed. It all adds up, you know. Stagnation. What happens after another five years? God knows. When your resources don't match your labour force, it's back to unemployment, depression, slump, starvation in the end. I tell you, you can feel it. Everyone's nervous. The men, it's as if they've got inferiority complexes. Perhaps it's just me, I don't know. Know what I see in a woman?"

Greg said nothing, waiting.

"Procreation. Babies. Which adds up to economic chaos. No wonder we're scared. Women are going to kill us off with their fertility, you realise?"

"You're not being objective," Greg said. "You've got your personal life mixed up with your science."

"You can't face the truth, man," Jamieson said. "That's all. It's obvious, isn't it? Can't you feel it? You, in your smart, manly fashions, trying to convince yourself of your masculinity? Up with this week's trends, because the advertisers, working for the corporations that rule our economy, have to keep the goods turning over more and more quickly, producing faster and faster to keep clear of a slump. We've hit a dead end, man, a dead end."

Greg stood up. He'd had enough. Jamieson took hold of his arm.

"All right, I admit I'm unbalanced," he said. He followed Greg outside. "But it all fits together. It's valid . . ."

Greg walked across the car park, the shining wind-

screens, glossy paint of the cars all around. Jamieson stood on the steps outside the pub's exit, staring out into the darkness. "She's a good, sweet girl," he called. "Cathy, she won't hurt you, she's all right." Greg walked away without looking back.

He phoned Cathy the next day, and drove over to meet her in the afternoon. It was dismal weather; the sky was overcast, a thin film of rain coming down and coating everything.

Her living room was smooth, smelling of luxury. A thick white hearthrug, white curtains; pale blue and pale orange-pink walls; indirect lighting. The window looked out on to the drab, dim and grey road below, rivulets of water running down the glass.

He sat down on a low stool by the room heater, she stretched out on the white rug. Greg finally broke the silence. "I met a man called Jamieson last night," he said, abruptly. "Have you got many friends like that?"

She smiled disarmingly, pulled herself closer to him, leant against his legs. "You mustn't worry about him. He's in a chronic state . . . broken home, I expect he told you. Convinced the world is doomed. He's got a bitch of a wife . . ."

"So you're being kind to him, trying to make him happier."

"What are you getting at, Greg?"

"I don't know; it's not a matter of trust, exactly, it's just I get the feeling you're keeping things back . . ."

"You don't know me at all, but you start questioning my private life."

He sighed. "I'm sorry. It was tactless."

"Don't apologise."

"No, I'm sorry, it must have been because I care about you, I want to know you better, Cathy . . ."

"Greg! Spare me the timeworn phrases." She stood up, walked to the window.

"I can't say anything, can I?"

"Don't keep on. Can't we go out somewhere? I'm sick of this flat."

He looked out at the rain. "Where can we go on a day like this?"

"I don't know . . . over to your place. I haven't seen your apartment."

"Anything you say," he said. half to himself.

They drove off in the car, tyres hissing on the wet roads, windshield wipers sweeping back and forth. The air was damp and cold; he turned the heater on. They headed westwards towards Kensington. The route took them through Notting Hill Gate; it was still a slum area. Everyone knew it, but there was no money to do anything about it, and few people really cared, least of all those who lived there. These were the dregs, the unproductive population: the old, crippled, moronic, criminal, and anyone else who preferred dirt and semi-starvation to work. The advertising campaigns passed them by, the fads and fashions had no appeal. These people were non-consumers, uncared for and forgotten.

Greg drove slowly down the silent streets. Here it always seemed cloudy and wet, perpetually overcast. An occasional face peered from behind a grimy window as the car passed; children stopped in the street, watching it go by.

"When we were still a struggling group, we used to live here," Greg said. "Then when the group started making progress, I still kept the old place going. Kind of attachment to it, you know? I come back, now and then, see what's going on, who's living there."

"Where is it?"

"We'll be going past it; it's a tenement, like the ones we're passing now." The drab, grey houses in long, featureless lines stood at either side of the street.

"Could we stop there? It'd be interesting."

"It's also sordid, a lodging house for beats and tramps . . ."

"I'd like to see it."

"If you really want to," he said. They turned a corner and pulled up outside a building as drab as the rest in the row along the street. Broken bottles littered the dirty concrete steps leading up to the front door.

Greg found a key that fitted the lock, and they walked into the hall. It was narrow, dark and smelly; an empty

light socket hung down half-way along. Music came from somewhere in the house. Sharp-smelling marijuana was on the air.

"They spend more money on drugs than on food," Greg said, closing the front door after them. "Go straight up the stairs. They sit around on the first floor in the daytime, ground floor at night."

The treads were coming off the stairs, the linoleum was worn and ragged. They went into the front room on the first floor. Dim grey light filtered through the cracked, dusty windows, showing fifteen or twenty figures sprawled about the room, many beating time to music coming from a decrepit tape-player. A table in the centre was littered with cigarette papers and tobacco ; a tramplike figure in a patched blue businessman's suit was crouched over it, slicing up marijuana with a rusty razor-blade. He looked round as they came in.

"Greg! Great to see you, kid," he said. "If you want Tony, he's upstairs. I'd come up with you, but we just scored, and I'm slicing the stuff up now."

They went on up to the top floor. A telephone coin box had been pulled away from the wall and emptied. The receiver hung by its cord, silent. A dim sense of decay covered everything ; the whole house smelled damp.

Greg knocked on a door at the top of the stairs. Cathy saw that the panels were splintered, as if someone had at some time tried to break in.

The door was opened by a girl of about sixteen or seventeen, dressed in jeans and a loose-fitting, dirty white shirt that hung down to below her waist.

"We've come to see Tony," Greg said. The girl walked back into the top floor flat, opened a door opposite. After a moment she returned, following Tony.

He was tall and well-built—the sort of physique that develops from eating little but doing hard, physical work. He had startling, pinpoint pupils set in clear, pale blue eyes. His face was tanned by exposure to sun and bad weather. His hair was cropped short, close to his skull. He was about twenty-five.

Greg shook hands with him. "Tony, this is Cathy, a friend of mine who wanted to see the place." Cathy hesi-

tantly extended her hand. He touched it briefly, looking at her face with his strangely intense eyes.

"Mouse," he called, without turning his head. The young girl appeared beside him. "You can clear the mess in the back room while I talk to my friends, here." She disappeared into the back, and Tony turned and walked through to his room at the front. Greg and Cathy followed.

The room was as untidy and dirty as the rooms downstairs. There was the same distasteful smell of unwashed flesh, the litter of burnt matches and cigarette ends on the floor. Old, torn clothes lay around the room.

Tony sat down on his decrepit bed, swung his feet up and lay back, resting his head against the wall. Greg sat on a pile of clothes heaped on a chair. Cathy walked to the window and looked down into the street outside.

"What brings you here?" Tony said.

"I mentioned it to Cathy, she thought she'd like to see it."

Tony grunted. He leaned over, picked up three cigarette papers, licked their edges and stuck them together. He cut off a piece of marijuana and divided it up, then roasted the bits inside a piece of silver paper over a match flame. He spread the blackened drug in tobacco he'd placed on the cigarette papers. He rolled it slowly, carefully, then lit it, inhaling deeply.

He held out the joint to Cathy. She looked uncertain.

"Take it, girl, don't waste it," Tony said.

Hesitantly, she took it from him. "Draw on it deep now," he said. "Hold the smoke down in your lungs as long as you can. Go on, have another drag." She exhaled, coughed, passed the joint back to Tony. "Do you want any, Greg?" he grunted. Greg shook his head. Tony shrugged.

He drew on the joint again, then passed it back to Cathy. "How're you feeling, girl?" he said.

She smiled. "It's . . . nice," she said.

"That's bloody good stuff you're smoking."

"Tony deals in it," Greg said.

"Mouse!" Tony shouted suddenly. A door slammed in the next room. The girl came in. "Get us some music,

Mouse, while we're turning on." All the time his eyes were on Cathy.

The girl brought in a battered portable radio. "Tune us some beat, some jazz, don't matter what." He stubbed out the joint. "If we're really lucky we might get to hear this kid's hit record." He laughed loudly at his own joke, started preparing another joint. Mouse tuned the radio to a commercial network, and left the room quietly.

Tony whistled through his teeth to the music as he bunched the tobacco into a strip down the middle of the papers. Greg shifted uncomfortably in his seat. The slum areas were somehow depressing ; it was as if they sought to drag you down into a grey timelessness where nothing ever happened, every day matched the one before, and hours slid by unnoticed.

"When have you got to be back?" he said to Cathy.

"She'll go when she's bloody ready," Tony cut in. "Leave the girl alone." He lit up the new joint and inhaled. Suddenly he grabbed a sheath knife from the table beside the bed and threw it in one quick motion at the dartboard across the room. It stuck in with a loud crack. Greg ducked back, caught off balance. Tony laughed, showing yellow teeth. "Go on," he said, "you piss off if you want to. It don't matter to me. Leave your girl here, though. Adds class to this place." He stared at Cathy again ; she met his eyes at first, then looked away. "Have another drag on this." He passed the joint over.

"I don't think I'd better . . ." their eyes met again.

"I'm telling you to," he said. She took it from him.

"Look, Tony," Greg began.

"You still here? I thought you'd gone."

"All right, cut it out. You're only putting on your big act because Cathy came along."

Tony laughed loudly, as if it were a great joke. Cathy giggled. Greg stepped across the room and took her hand. "Cathy, we'd better go." She followed him to the door, smiling a little stupidly.

"I'll have the place cleared up for you, next time you come, girl," Tony shouted as they left the room. "Come back and see me soon, won't you?"

Outside, it was still raining. They got into the car in silence, and drove off down the deserted street.

"I'm sorry," Greg said. "Tony can be a bastard when he wants to be."

"How did you ever get to know him?" she said, then giggled. "Damn it, that stuff goes to your head."

"I let him take over the place when we left," Greg said. "He collects a little cash from the crowd sleeping there, but half the rent he pays himself. It gives him a kick to feel king of the place, in charge of it."

"He's in charge of it," she said. "That's clear enough."

"Don't be taken in," said Greg. "It's all an act; really, he's just another bum like the others, one up on them because he's managed to fight and steal better than they have, in the long run."

"Which is something to be proud of, if nothing else," she said.

"Do you want to go on to Kensington, now?"

"No, let's go back to my place," she said. "Yours would be an anticlimax, in a way, wouldn't it?"

He laughed, a little uneasily; the comment unsettled him a little. "Kensington isn't a slum, if that's what you mean," he said.

She didn't say anything, right up till the time Greg dropped her at Hampstead. "I'm sorry," he said, "it was a lousy afternoon."

"It was an . . . experience."

"Try to make it to the Beat Forum tonight. We're playing there."

She got out of the car. "Yes," she said, "I'll try and make it."

Cathy never arrived at the club. Greg waited around near the entrance, watching for her, but without success.

Their act was as good as ever; the music, the eyes of the audience on him, the spotlights, the applause . . . it all made him feel good. At the end of the performance the crowd shouted for more, and Greg wished Cathy could have seen him on stage, the lights shining on his brilliant white suit, making him feel as big as the world.

For a while, Cathy had stayed in her flat, wandering

idly from room to room, feeling the time dragging heavily on her now she had nothing to do. She played with the little monkey and talked to him; but found him boring and a little pathetic. In the end she decided to go out somewhere.

She drove her car until she came to a cinema; she watched the picture until ten-thirty, though not really interested in the grotesque, larger-than-life characters. After that, she just moved with the stream of cars, until suddenly she realised she was back in Notting Hill Gate. She wondered vaguely if she had wanted to come back there all the time; but the thoughts didn't really form coherently in her mind.

The pubs were closing, and groups of ragged people were in the street, drunk on their dole money. She parked the car and got out, standing on the pavement, her coat pulled tightly around her, the wind blowing in her face. The streetlamps shone a cold, dim light over everything.

A voice floated down the street; it was Tony's voice. "Hey-hey"! he shouted. "Christ, look who we got here." He led a group of stumbling, singing beats down the road towards her. "What are you waiting for, girl? Waiting for me, were you?" he stopped in front of her, laughed roughly, the rest of the drunken crowd behind him. "Come on then, join the party. It's Friday, we got half an ounce of hash to get through. Going to be an all-night turn-on." He put his arm round her and led the mob on down the road. Cathy felt scared, alone; scared half because she didn't understand herself.

They stumbled up the steps and into the ground floor room. "I feel like smashing something," Tony shouted, kicking out at a chair and splintering it. He laughed. Soon they had all sat down and were smoking the stuff Tony had bought that night, she with the rest of them. The tape player was blasting out music. The world seemed to recede; she was drifting, detached staring unseeingly at the strange people in the room shouting and dancing. Tony came over to her, pulled her up beside him. "Come on girl," he said. "Reckon you've had enough."

On the top floor, his room was damp and bleak, bathed in weak electric light. He took off her coat, dropping it on the floor, and led her over to his bed. His body smelled

thickly of dry sweat, and she pulled away from him. "Don't do that," he said, lying back on the bed. He unbuttoned his shirt, showing the brown skin beneath. "Come along, come down to me. Don't worry about it, just let it happen, love . . ." She looked into his eyes and felt weakened, the tiny pupils in the ghostly pale irises boring into her, unblinking. She let herself go down into his arms and the odour of his body seemed to close around her. He circled his arms over her and she felt the tense, strong muscles; he rolled on to her and kissed her roughly, and it was as if she was falling backwards, losing touch with the world. With a sudden cry she gave way to him and clutched at his hard, tanned body, needing him and what he stood for, opening herself to him, losing a reserve that she suddenly realised she had never lost before.

The next morning, when Greg called at her apartment, he found Cathy sitting in the kitchen in her dressing-gown, in front of an empty coffee cup.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I thought you'd be up by now . . ."

"I didn't get home till early this morning," she said, listlessly, remembering creeping out of the tenement in Notting Hill Gate and driving back in the dawn.

"I came round because there's something on my mind," Greg said. "I've just got to straighten things out, Cathy. There was a journalist I met last night; he's the one who I broke off an interview with, a while ago, at the press party where I first met you. It turns out he knows you."

"I know a lot of journalists."

"But some better than most. Last night, after the act, he was trying to persuade me to leave you alone. Seems he's hooked on you, Cathy. It's like that man Jamieson; he's got no one else to live for."

She sighed. "So you found out, Greg."

"But I haven't! Can't you tell me what's going on? How many more people are you keeping happy? Who are they?"

"When you bring it down to basic terms, I'm a whore, Greg. Wealthy men think I make them happy. They give me presents."

Somehow her flat, listless voice made the words more

cruel. Greg stood, silent, looking at her. "I don't believe you," he said, "you're not like that."

"Damn you!" Cathy suddenly shouted, standing up. "If I tell you it's true, it's true! It's what you wanted to know, isn't it? Isn't it?"

Greg still said nothing.

"What's the matter with you? Why do you just stand there? Hit me, damn it, or walk out on me; slap my face, call me a bitch, but don't just stand there." She turned suddenly and hurried out of the room, into her bedroom. Greg went after her.

"There's no sense in what you're saying, Cathy," he said. "I don't care what you are, I can forgive you for your past. It doesn't matter, don't you see?"

"It *should* matter, isn't it obvious? What's wrong with you, Greg? Why are you so weak? Like all the rest of your poor bloody neurotic sex. Look, I'm a whore, I'm a slut." She stared at him, challengingly. "Don't you care?"

"Cathy, Cathy . . . let's get away from London, spend two or three days abroad, in France, Italy—it's up to you. Give ourselves a chance and see if things can't work out . . ."

She sat down, abruptly, and started to cry. "Why couldn't you . . . why couldn't you be what I wanted you to be? Go on, Greg, go away, leave me alone."

"Please, Cathy, listen . . ."

"For God's sake, don't *crawl*! Go away, leave me!"

"I'll come back some other time," he said. "But I like you, Cathy, remember that. I like you, very much." He walked out slowly and shut the door.

She sat staring at the featureless painted wood, dabbing at her eyes. "And you didn't even protest when I told you to go away," she murmured.

The phone call came late that evening. He grabbed the receiver.

"Is that Cathy?" the view screen remained blank.

"Yes, Greg, I phoned because I thought I ought to tell you it's over."

"But, wait a minute . . ."

"I've decided—I've decided I've had enough, Greg.

Enough of the wonderful good life. I'm throwing it all, over, I'm going to live with Tony."

"But that's . . . you must be mad, Cathy."

"That's all I've got to say, Greg. Thanks for the trips we made. It was fun. You were fun, too."

"Wait a minute, Cathy, I'll come over now, we can talk things over."

"That's all, Greg."

"Wait!"

The phone went dead. He slammed it back in its cradle. He walked across the room, then back again, gnawing his thumbnail. Then he grabbed his jacket from its hook, hurried out of the flat and down the stairs to the street.

He took off from the kerb, spinning the rear wheels; the sickly smell of burnt rubber drifted in the air as he accelerated off down the road, the turbine roaring. He turned into the Cromwell Motorway section, into the fast lane, feeling somehow detached from the roaring engine and the power of the sports car under him. His headlights flooded the road, the cars on the inner lanes flashed past behind him.

He filtered off the motorway, overshot a junction long after the lights had turned red. White faces of frightened pedestrians flashed past, gone in an instant. He flung the car into a sharp bend, overtaking other vehicles, dodging those coming towards him, tyres screaming. The lights in the shops and the signs and on the cars were somehow hypnotic.

He found himself approaching Piccadilly, here the traffic was dense, as people flocked into the West End for evening entertainment. He turned into a side street, lined with parked cars; he crossed Shaftesbury Avenue, battling through the traffic. In Soho, he no longer knew really where he was or where he was trying to get to; all the streets seemed the same, he felt somehow he needed to go faster, just a little faster.

He missed the red NO ENTRY signs; he didn't hear the people shouting at him to stop. His speed was near fifty when he collided into the other car that had turned into the street ahead of him.

There was the unreal shock of the impact, then flying

through the air, the car turning slightly. The seream of ruptured metal as it skidded along the road on its side.

I should have been killed, he thought dimly to himself, struggling to open the car door. It had somersaulted over the other vehicle, had ended up half-way down the road. He scrambled free from the wreek, wiping blood away from his face where it flowed from a eut in his forehead. The other car had been smashed against a wall by the impaet. Petrol was running over the road and down the gutter. Pedestrians gestured and argued, one of them dragging the driver out of the wreeked ear. His arm was broken but he was still alive. He kept sereaming.

Greg stumbled on down the street. No one seemed to realise that he had been driving the sports car. He found he could hardly believe in the world around him, the neon tubes and the people on the pavements. It was somehow sordid. The ehaos of the aecident receded behind him; dimly he heard the noise of poliee and ambulance sirens, but they didn't seem to apply to him.

He went into a pub; it was too erowded for anyone to notice his cut faee and blood-stained elothes. He pushed through into the lavatory at the back, stood in the white-tiled, brightly-lit place, blinking. He wetted his handker-chief and wiped the blood off his faee, staring at himself in the mirror over the basin. The cold water brought him baek to reality, and his hands started to shake in reaetion from the shoek of the aeeident he'd eaused. Fantasies of maimed bystanders mown down by the flying car, of injury to the other driver, were shifting at the baek of his mind. He eleaned the rest of his elothes, then leant against the white-tiled wall a moment, trying to eompose himself. He ought to go baek to the aecident, he knew, but he had to get to Hampstead, baek to Cathy.

In the bar, the thiek smoky atmosphere was hard to breathe and the noise of eonversation like a blanket round his ears. He ordered a drink, then another, asking for Lime-tang out of habit, then he finished with a double brandy and pushed through the people to the street outside.

The aleohol strengthened him but confused his thinking; he stood outside in the cool night air unable to force him-self to remember what he had to do. It was dream-like;

he didn't understand. He started walking down the street, turned off into a narrower alley. Strip clubs were either side, knots of men and youths hanging around them.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned round. He looked up, confused by emotion and drink, into the girl's face.

"You look lonely, love. Why not come upstairs with me?"

Her blonde hair hung down to her shoulders. She smiled. Greg took a step backwards; the girl was just about the same height as Cathy.

He kept bumping into people on the pavement, the drink had gone to his head. A blind beggar was crouched by the kerb, crying out for money; Greg saw him and threw a coin in his cap. Then it was as if the dirty, scruffy old man had acquired Tony's face and features: acting in blind emotion, Greg kicked him. The cap full of money scattered across the pavement, the beggar fell over moaning and grovelling for the coins. Greg stepped on his fingers, pulling the sign the man wore round his neck away from him. Hand-painted letters spelled out BLIND. Greg broke it in half, throwing the pieces at the body of the old man where he lay on the ground, groaning.

"You bastard!" he muttered, "that'll show you you're not a better bloody man than I am!"

He ran unsteadily away down the road; at some traffic lights he jumped on a bus that would take him to Swiss Cottage.

He lost his way, looking for Fitzjohns Avenue, finding himself outside a pub. It was closing time, people were pouring into the street in a crowd. A figure stood pressed up against the wall of the building, eyes wide and frightened; Greg saw it was Jamieson, the failed university graduate he had met what seemed weeks ago and had talked with in this same bar.

He pushed his way across to the man.

"She's gone and left me!" Jamieson shouted, seeing Greg. "Cathy's gone!" Greg shouldered past some other people emerging into the street. He suddenly saw, with a cold feeling, that Jamieson's artificial limbs were missing;

his spastic thalidomide hands, joined almost directly to his shoulders, flapped helplessly, ghost-white.

"Your arms!" Greg shouted, "what's happened to your arms?"

"I don't know, I don't know what's going on, I just found myself here . . ." he started crying. "She's gone away and left me helpless! I'm no use, now, no more use than any man. Go on, boy, while you have the chance, go and find her . . . We're a dead sex, a failed race, a doomed world . . ." his muddled thoughts and sentences degenerated into incomprehensibility. "We're helpless!" he shouted again. "Helpless!" He flapped his stumpy hands again, starting to sob more loudly.

Greg backed away, frightened. Jamieson was becoming hysterical and didn't notice him leave. "We're helpless!" he kept shouting.

The jumbled sense-impressions of the evening were twisted in Greg's mind; he walked slowly up the hill, breathing hard, and gradually his head cleared. He tried not to think back over the evening; the magnitude of it was too great to hold in his mind. He was aware of a steady pulling desire for Cathy, he needed her. He swore softly to himself as he plodded on up the hill. He didn't know what he really felt, or what he was going to do.

He reached the building and paused outside, heart hammering. The top floor lights were on; she must still be there. It was an effort to walk to the door at the bottom of the building.

Sounds of singing and shouting drifted down the stairwell; a door opened, and people came out on to the landing above. There was a party going on, people coming down red-faced, half drunk.

Greg pressed the button by the elevator; it seemed to be out of order.

A heavy arm came down across his shoulders.

"Won't do no good pressing that button, kid. Elevator's stuck halfway up. Too many god-damn drunken bastards in it." He doubled up, laughing, a large, beefy American with scotch on his breath. "Hey, why doncha have a drink, friend?"

"No, I've got to get upstairs . . ."

"C'mon, buddy, makes you feel good inside."

"Please, will you let me . . ."

"I'll tell you something, friend. I don't blame you staying off the bottle. It's a dead end, know that? Drinking, I mean. Hell, but I can't help it any more, know what I mean? All I got left. They was training me, see, for five-six years, getting ready for their god-damn expedition to Saturn. Never knew about that, didja? We was going out there, not just to Mars, Jupiter, right the way out to the one with rings round it. Hell, that'd give the Russians something to think about, right? Yeah, that was before the space drain, the clampdown . . ."

"Will you let me past?" Greg pushed but the ex-astronaut didn't move.

"I set foot on the moon, know that? Second expedition. Tell ya something, buddy, they trained me five-six years, for nothing, you know that? Getting ready for the Saturn expedition. Never heard of it, didja? Not just Mars . . ."

Greg struggled free from the man's heavy arm; he slumped to the floor, still mumbling. "Now who needs a bloody spaceman?" he grunted. "Food experts, farming technicians, chemical workers, oh yeah, but a bloody spaceman's just a drag to have around, got no use for him . . ."

Greg went up the stairs, past other people from the party. On the first landing, two women were arguing in high-pitched voices. One of them was holding protectively what at first Greg took to be a child; with a shock, he realised it was a dwarf, a miniature man, the size of a ten-year-old.

"Leave him alone!" one woman was saying. "He came with me!"

"All right, darling, all right, there's no need to be emotional. You must admit he's rather sweet, I just wanted to *hold* him, that's all . . ."

The door of Cathy's flat was wide open. He walked in and looked around him; the place was empty. All the lights had been left burning.

He walked to the centre of the living-room. Odd items had been taken away: the lampshade was gone, the cur-

tains missing. The white rug by the heater had been removed.

"Cathy!" he shouted. His voice sounded dead in the room. He went into the kitchen; the doors of the cupboards were all open, their contents out on the table and on the floor. Here again items were missing; the towels, the plates, soap, detergent.

The bathroom was empty, toothbrushes and face-flannel gone.

He opened the bedroom door. The bed was stripped; the wardrobe was open, a few of its dresses taken. The dressing table drawers were all pulled out, only a few oddments left in them.

She had left the monkey there; it sat in the corner, huddled against the wall, staring at the empty room.

Greg walked across the thick, spongy carpet and looked out of the window. The lights of London were spread out in the darkness. Down there, people were living in a fast spiral that tightened daily, keeping up with next week's trends and fashions, running to keep in one place. Buying, consuming, breeding . . . Over there, in the slum areas, dimly lit, the chronically poor, useless to the State by virtue of their unsuitability for work, lived each day the same as the last, unaware of the good life, aware only of themselves.

Greg groaned. The weight of everything seemed to sink on top of him. What a mess, a failure; yet, in its way, inevitable.

He kicked at the floor-to-ceiling window; glass shattered and fell on to the balcony outside. He kicked another pane, and a cold blast of air wafted into the room.

In the corner, the monkey chattered at him, jumping up and down in a frenzy. Greg walked over and stared down at the pathetic creature. It bared its teeth in a parody of ferocity. He kicked at it, but somehow couldn't bring himself to injure it; it was almost like attacking himself.

Greg turned, looked around him once more at the flat, then walked out of the bedroom and the front door, leaving it open and all the lights burning.

The monkey watched him go. It strained at its chain,

making little whining noises. The wind blew in and ruffled its fur ; the front door slammed shut. The monkey shivered.

It had no way of understanding what had happened ; it only knew that somehow Cathy had gone away and left it. Without her to provide for it, it would soon sicken and die.

It pulled and bit at its chain, then crouched back into the corner, chattering senselessly.

NEXT MONTH

NWSF 159 will contain David I. Masson's entertaining new story *A Two-Timer*, written in a highly original way. This story will show yet another side of the brilliant talents of Mr. Masson, whose first story has already been aken for a leading U.S. anthology. Also appearing will be stories by Philip E. High, John Watney, A. F. Hall, Daphne Castell and Paul Jents, plus our usual features. Be sure of getting all the forthcoming issues by filling in the subscription form on page 127. Authors due to appear soon include J. G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, Roger Zelazny, E. C. Tubb, Judith Merril, Michael Moorcock, David Masson, John Brunner, Langdon Jones, Charles Platt, George Collyn and many more NWSF favourites.

Don't miss an issue

LOVE IS AN IMAGINARY NUMBER

Roger Zelazny

THEY SHOULD HAVE known that they could not keep me bound forever. Probably they did, which is why there was always Stella.

I lay there staring over at her, arm outstretched above her head, masses of messed blonde hair framing her sleeping face. She was more than wife to me: she was warden. How blind of me not to have realized it sooner!

But then, what else had they done to me?

They had made me to forget what I was.

Because I was like them but not of them they had bound me to this time and this place.

They had made me to forget. They had nailed me with love.

I stood up and the last chains fell away.

A single bar of moonlight lay upon the floor of the bed chamber. I passed through it to where my clothing was hung.

There was a faint music playing in the distance. That was what had done it. It had been so long since I had heard that music. . . .

How had they trapped me?

That little kingdom, ages ago, some Other, where I had introduced gunpowder—— Yes! That was the place! They had trapped me there with my Other-made monk's hood and my classical Latin.

Then brainsmash and binding to this Otherwhen.

I chuckled softly as I finished dressing. How long had I lived in this place? Forty-five years of memory—but how much of it counterfeit?

The hall mirror showed me a middle-aged man, slightly obese, hair thinning, wearing a red sports shirt and black slacks.

The music was growing louder, the music only I could hear: guitars, and the steady *thump* of a leather drum.

My different drummer, aye! Mate me with an angel and you still do not make me a saint, my comrades!

I made myself young and strong again.

Then I descended the stair to the living room, moved to the bar, poured out a glass of wine, sipped it until the music reached its fullest intensity, then gulped the remainder and dashed the glass to the floor. I was free!

I turned to go, and there was a sound overhead.

Stella had awakened.

The telephone rang. It hung there on the wall and rang and rang until I could stand it no longer.

I raised the receiver.

"You have done it again," said that old, familiar voice.

"Do not go hard with the woman," said I. "She could not watch me always."

"It will be better if you stay right where you are," said the voice. "It will save us both much trouble."

"Good night," I said and hung up.

The receiver snapped itself around my wrist and the cord became a chain fastened to a ring-bolt in the wall. How childish of them!

I heard Stella dressing upstairs. I moved eighteen steps sidewise from There, to the place where my scaled limb slid easily from out the vines looped about it.

Then, back again to the living-room and out the front door. I needed a mount.

I backed the convertible out of the garage. It was the faster of the two cars. Then out on to the nighted highway, and then a sound of thunder overhead.

It was a Piper Cub, sweeping in low, out of control. I slammed on the brakes and it came on, shearing treetops and snapping telephone lines, to crash in the middle of the street half a block ahead of me. I took a sharp left turn into an alley, and then on to the next street paralleling my own.

If they wanted to play it that way, well—I am not exactly without resources along those lines myself. I was pleased that they had done it first, though.

I headed out into the country, to where I could build up a head of steam.

Lights appeared in my rearview mirror.

Them?

Too soon.

It was either just another car headed this way, or it was Stella.

Prudence, like the Greek Chorus says, is better than imprudence.

I shifted, not gears.

I was whipping along in a lower, more powerful car.

Again, I shifted.

I was driving from the wrong side of the vehicle and headed up the wrong side of the highway.

Again.

No wheels. My car sped forward on a cushion of air, above a beaten and dilapidated highway. All the buildings I passed were of metal. No wood or stone or brick had gone into the construction of anything I saw.

On the long curve behind me, a pair of headlights appeared.

I killed my own lights and shifted, again and again, and again.

I shot through the air, high above a great swampland, stringing sonic booms like beads along the thread of my trail. Then another shift, and I shot low over the steaming land where great reptiles raised their heads like beanstalks from out their wallows. The sun stood high in this world, like an acetylene torch in the heavens. I held the struggling vehicle together by an act of will and waited for pursuit. There was none.

I shifted again. . . .

There was a black forest reaching almost to the foot of the high hill upon which the ancient castle stood. I was mounted on a hippogriff, flying, and garbed in the manner of a warrior-image. I steered my mount to a landing within the forest.

"Become a horse," I ordered, giving the proper guide-word.

Then I was mounted upon a black stallion, trotting along the trail which twisted through the dark forest.

Should I remain here and fight them with magic, or move on and meet them in a world where science prevailed?

Or should I beat a circuitous route from here to some distant Other, hoping to elude them completely?

My questions answered themselves.

There came a clatter of hooves at my back, and a knight appeared: he was mounted upon a tall, proud steed; he wore burnished armour; upon his shield was set a cross of red.

"You have come far enough," he said. "Draw rein!"

The blade he bore upraised was a wicked and gleaming weapon, until I transformed it into a serpent. He dropped it then, and it slithered off into the underbrush.

"You were saying . . .?"

"Why don't you give up?" he asked. "Join us, or quit trying?"

"Why don't *you* give up? Quit them and join with me? We could change many times and places together. You have the ability, and the training. . . ."

By then he was close enough to lunge, in an attempt to unhorse me with the edge of his shield.

I gestured and his horse stumbled, casting him to the ground.

"Everywhere you go, plagues and wars follow at your heels!" he gasped.

"All progress demands payment. These are the growing pains of which you speak, not the final results."

"Fool! There is no such thing as progress! Not as you see it! What good are all the machines and ideas you unloose in their cultures, if you do not change the men themselves?"

"Thought and mechanism advances; men follow slowly," I said, and I dismounted and moved to his side. "All that your kind seek is a perpetual Dark Age on all planes of existence. Still, I am sorry for what I must do."

I unsheathed the knife at my belt and slipped it through his visor, but the helm was empty. He had escaped into another Place, teaching me once again the futility of arguing with an ethical evolutionary.

I remounted and rode on.

After a time, there came again the sound of hooves at my back.

I spoke another word, which mounted me upon a sleek unicorn, to move at a blinding speed through the dark wood. The pursuit continued, however.

Finally, I came upon a small clearing, a cairn piled high in its centre. I recognised it as a place of power, so I dismounted and freed the unicorn, which promptly vanished.

I climbed the cairn and sat at its top. I lit a cigar and waited. I had not expected to be located so soon, and it irritated me. I would confront this pursuer here.

A sleek grey mare entered the clearing.

"Stella!"

"Get down from there!" she cried. "They are preparing to unleash an assault any moment now!"

"Amen," I said. "I am ready for it."

"They outnumber you! They always have! You will lose to them again, and again and again, so long as you persist in fighting. Come down and come away with me. It may not be too late!"

"Me, retire?" I asked. "I'm an institution. They would soon be out of crusades without me. Think of the boredom—"

A bolt of lightning dropped from the sky, but it veered away from my cairn and fried a nearby tree.

"They've started!"

"Then get out of here, girl. This isn't your fight."

"You're mine!"

"I'm my own! Nobody else's! Don't forget it!"

"I love you!"

"You betrayed me!"

"No. You say that you love humanity. . . ."

"I do."

"I don't believe you! You couldn't, after all you've done to it!"

I raised my hand. "I banish thee from this Now and Here," I said, and I was alone again.

More lightnings descended, charring the ground about me.

I shook my fist.

"Don't you *ever* give up? Give me a century of peace to work with them, and I'll show you a world that you don't believe could exist!" I cried.

In answer, the ground began to tremble.

I fought them. I hurled their lightnings back in their faces. When the winds arose, I bent them inside-out. But

the earth continued to shake, and cracks appeared at the foot of the cairn.

"Show yourselves!" I cried. "Come at me one at a time, and I'll teach you of the power I wield!"

But the ground opened up and the cairn came apart.

I fell into darkness.

I was running. I had shifted three times, and I was a furred creature now with a pack howling at my heels, eyes like fiery headlights, fangs like swords.

I was slithering among the dark roots of the banyan, and the long-billed criers were probing after my scaly body. . . .

I was darting on the wings of a humming-bird and I heard the cry of a hawk. . . .

I was swimming through blackness and there came a tentacle. . . .

I broadcast away, peaking and troughing at a high frequency.

I met with static.

I was falling and they were all around me.

I was taken as a fish is taken in a net. I was snared, bound. . . .

I heard her weeping, somewhere.

"Why do you try, again and ever again?" she asked. "Why can you not be content with me, with a life of peace and leisure? Do you not remember what they have done to you in the past? Were not your days with me infinitely better?"

"No!" I cried.

"I love you," she said.

"Such love is an imaginary number," I told her, and I was raised from where I lay and borne away.

She followed behind, weeping.

"I pleaded with them to give you a chance at peace, but you threw that gift in my face."

"The peace of the eunuch ; the peace of lobotomy, lotus and Thorazine," I said. "No, better they work their wills upon me and let their truth give forth its lie as they do."

"Can you really say that and mean it?" she asked. "Have you already forgotten the sun of the Caucasus—the vulture tearing at your side, day after hot red day?"

"I do not forget," I said, "but I curse them. I will oppose them until the ends of When and Wherever, and someday I shall win."

"I love you," she said.

"How can you say that and mean it?"

"Fool"! came a chorus of voices, as I was laid upon this rock in this cavern and chained.

All day long a bound serpent spits venom into my face, and she holds a pan to catch it. It is only when the woman who betrayed me must empty that pan that it spits into my eyes and I scream.

But I *will* come free again, to aid long-suffering mankind with my many gifts, and there will be a trembling on high that day I end my bondage. Until then, I can only watch the delicate, unbearable bars of her fingers across the bottom of that pan, and scream each time she takes them away.

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MOUTH OF HELL

WHEN THE EXPEDITION reached the plateau, driving by short stages from the northern foothills, they found it devoid of human life, a silent plain variegated by little flowers and garish patches of moss and lichen. Kettass, the leader, called a halt, and surveyed the landscape while the tractors were overhauled. The sun shone brightly out of a clear sky, not far to south for the quasi-arctic ecology was one of height, not latitude. Mosquitoes hovered low down over tussocks below wind-level, beetles and flies crawled over the flowers. Beyond a quarter-metre above the ground, however, a bitter wind from the north flowed steadily. The distance was clear but it was difficult to interpret what one saw, and the treeless waste held no clues to size. Ground undulations were few. There were no signs of permafrost beneath. After a time a fox could be made out trekking southward some way off. Some larger tracks, not hooved, showed by the edge of a bog pool. If one wandered far from the vehicles and men, the silence was broken only by the thin sound of the wind where it combed a grass mound, the zizz and skrittle of insects, the distant yipe of fox or other hunting animal, and the secretive giggle of seeping water. Here and there on the north side of a mound or clump traces of rime showed, and a few of the pool edges were lightly frozen.

Returning to the main body, Kettass ordered the mid-day meal to be prepared. He thought about the situation. The wind was a trouble: it was steady and merciless and evidently below freezing point. One could bake at one's south side and freeze, literally, on one's north side. As the hour wore on the wind increased and became, if anything, colder as the sun grew hotter. But a fringe of dark grey cloud began to climb along the southern horizon, like a ragged curtain seen from upside down, climbed and spread, until its outer streamers menaced the sun. Kettass, got the party going again, and the little group of tractors trundled carefully, picking their way, towards the clouds.

After two hours, 'Afpeng spotted a herd of greydeer and

the party stopped. A long stalk by 'Afpeng, Laafif and Niizmek secured three carcasses which were strapped to the vehicles, and the party moved on. The clouds continued to grow and by evening covered half the sky, to south, the icy wind from the north meanwhile growing in strength. A camp was made, using the tractors as weather walls to supplement the canvas. The deer were cured and their flesh preserved, against a time of shortage of food.

During a wakeful night the wind blew steadily on, slackening only towards dawn. The night was clear and freezing hard. In the morning the sky was cloudless and the whole plateau covered with white frost.

"What direction now, chief?" asked Mehhtumm over breakfast.

"Press on south, simply."

In two hours the frost was gone. The beetles came out from their hiding places, the sun beat down, the ground was warm, but the wind blew fiercer than ever and as cold. Far ahead, cumulus heads rose fully formed from the horizon, and soon towering thunderclouds covered the southern sky. A screen of false cirrus spread and became a grey pall, shutting off the sun. The wind grew and turned gusty at times.

"Have you noticed the ground?" said Mehhtumm in Kettass' ear some hours later.

"The slope? Yes." And the chief halted the convoy. It was just as though someone had tilted the world slightly. They were pointing down a gentle slope, nearly uniform, which spread east and west as far as eye could see. Behind to north, the same slope. The change had been too gradual to notice before. Kettass had the troop deploy into a broad arrow with his vehicle in the lead and centre.

In the next two hours the tilt became more and more pronounced. Pools had become moist watercourse-beds. Kettass' altimeter showed that they were down half-way to sea-level. Yet the vegetation was hardly changed. The mosses were richer, the ground almost hot, but the icy gale hurtled at their backs as if to push them down the hillside, a hillside that stretched mile after mile to either horizon. They were shut in north and south by the tilt of the ground, now visibly a curve round which they could not see.

'Ossnaal's face was a grey-green, and Kettass wondered why one who could be so cool on a rock-face should be so easily affected by this landscape. Not that 'Afpeng looked too good, and no one was happy.

"Where's it going to end, eh?" muttered Laafif.

The thundercloud had become a vast wall of dark vapour, lit by frequent flashes. An almost continuous rumbling came from the south, and their sets crackled. Kettass ordered the vehicles to run level with his own. The slope was now a clear threat to progress.

An hour later Kettass stopped the vehicles again. The slope was dangerously steep. Although it was barely noon the light was poor, under the pall of cloud which now arched over most of the sky. Plants were more lush but more isolated, so that much rock and gravel could be seen. The biting wind rushed on.

"Looks as though we'll need our climbing suckers after all," suggested Mehhtumm. Pripand and Ghuddup were muttering together beside vehicle 5 and looking darkly about them. 'Ossnaal's face was white and everyone looked anxious.

"If only a handy hollow or ledge would appear, then we could park the tractors," went on Mehhtumm. Kettass said nothing. He was considering the altimeter.

"Must be *below* sea-level," he said at last; "yet no trees, nothing but this arctic wind, keeping vegetation down I suppose, and no sign of a bottom." Then "Immobilise here, everybody. Keep two vehicle-lengths apart. Cast out grapnels as best you can. Pull out the packs and climbing equipment, just in case. Pitch tents, but well east of the vehicle line, and choose vegetation areas: the gravel may be in the track of floods. Same thing with the stores. After all that's done, a meal."

Before the meal was ready the gale was suddenly full of soft hail, which turned to cold rain. The afternoon was punctuated by showers of this sort. The grapnels saved two vehicles from rolling off in a shallow spate.

Kettass held a council of war. "Seems to me," growled Niizmek, "there's no bottom in front of us. We could send one or two ahead to report, and camp here till we know more."

"What do you say, 'Afpeng?"

"Strike twenty kilometres east or west, in case there's a spur or a chimney?"

" 'Ossnaal?"

"I think. . . . I don't. . . . It's a waste of time trying east or west. You can see there's nothing however far you go. It's go on or turn back."

"You can't take the lot of us," Laafif snapped; "you can't get enough stores down with us, without tractors. If the ground isn't reached soon and this slope steepens, we've had it. Only two or three men can get down, and then only for a few kilometres' travel."

Ghuddup and Pripand, mechanics, said nothing.

"I think," now put in Mehhtumm, "we might send a patrol party first tomorrow, to go up to half a day down, return by twilight, and report. Then you can decide, eh, chief?"

"Probably best, but I'll sleep on it," said Kettass.

Few slept that night. The wind was moist, the ground cooled off, the thunder ceased after midnight but the storm of wind roared on. Next morning again a clear sky, apart from some tumbling clouds low down on the southern horizon (which owing to the slope, was not very far off). It was chilly but not freezing. Kettass chose a party of three after a breakfast at first light, among the long dark purple shadows cast across the tilted ground by vehicles and tents. Mehhtumm was to lead; for the other two Kettass asked for volunteers. To his surprise 'Ossnaal and Ghuddup spoke up. "If we're not able to use the tractors I'll be at a loose end. Pripand can keep an eye on them. I like climbing, if we get any," said Ghuddup. 'Ossnaal assured Kettass he was fit; "I want to find out what we are really coming to."

The trio set off almost at once; besides iron rations and water, ropes and the newly devised suckers, they carried oxygen. "You don't know how deep this basin is going to go, and what air you'll encounter," Kettass pointed out.

At first they were in communication with the main party. but at about five kilometres reception grew too faint, partly from the crackling that came with the morning's cumulo-nimbus. Before this Mehhtumm reported that the air-

pressure suggested they were 2,000 metres below Mean Sea-Level, that the slope was over 50° from the horizontal, that the surface was rock and sand, interspersed with unusual and highly-coloured liehen, that there were numerous small torrents east and west of them, and that mist and cloud had appeared, hovering off the edge not far below. After that, silence . . . until a hysterical signal, eventually identified as Mehhtumm's, in the deep evening twilight.

Soon after they lost radio contact with the camp, Mehhtumm, 'Ossnaal and Ghuddup paused to stare at the cloud-formations. Swags of dirty grey, like dust under beds, floated in the air level with their eyes and a kilometre or so south. Lightning from the formless curtain behind turned them into smoky silhouettes. The cumuloid heads above had largely vanished in the general mass of thundercloud. The tilted horizon terminated in a great roll of elear-edged cloud like a monstrous eel, which extended indefinitely east and west. The ground air, at any rate, was here free of the gale, but the rush of wind could be heard between the thunder. The atmosphere was damp and extremely warm. The rock surface was hot. What looked like dark, richly-coloured polyps and sea-anemones thrust and hung obscenely here and there from crannies. The scene was picked out now and again by shafts of roasting sunlight funnelling down brassily above an occasional cauliflower top or through a chasm in the cloud-curtain. Progress even with suckers was slow. Mehhtumm got them roped together.

An hour later the slope was 70°, with a few ledges bearing thorn bushes, dwarf pines, and peculiar succulents. The torrents had become thin waterfalls, many floating outwards into spray. A scorehing breeze was wafting up from below. Two parallel lines of the roller cloud now stretched above them, and the storm seemed far above that. The smooth, brittle rock would take no carabiners.

A curious patternless pattern of dull pink, cloudy lemon yellow, and Wedgwood blue could just be diseerned through the foggy air between their feet. It conveyed nothing, and the steepening curvature of their perch had no

visible relation to it. Altimeters were now impossible to interpret, but they must clearly be several kilometres below sea-level. Crawling sensations possessed their bodies, as though they had been turned to soda-water, as Ghuddup remarked, and their ears thrummed.

Mehhtumm and Ghuddup ate part of their iron rations and swallowed some water, but 'Ossnaal, whose face was a bluish pink, could only manage the water. They took occasional pulls of oxygen, without noticeably improving their sensations.

Two hours later found them clinging to a nearly vertical rock face which continued indefinitely east, west and below. The patternless pattern below their feet was the same, no nearer visibly and no clearer. The waterfalls had turned to fine tepid rain. The air behind them, so far as it could be seen (Mehhtumm used a hand mirror) was a mass of dark grey vapour, with much turbulence, through which coppery gleams of hot sunlight came rarely. The traces of sky above were very pale. The naked rock was blisteringly hot, even through sucker-gloves, but carried a curious purple and orange pattern of staining, perhaps organic. The crawling sensation had become a riot of turbulence in their flesh. Their ears were roaring. Something stabbed in their chests at intervals. Their sense of touch was disturbed and difficult. It was lucky they had suckers. Yet with all this, an enormous elation possessed Mehhtumm, an almost childish sense of adventure. 'Ossnaal was murmuring continuously to himself. Ghuddup was chuckling and apostrophising the "Paisley patterns" of the abyss.

Half an hour later 'Ossnal gave a shrill cry which could be heard in the others' earphones, and went into some sort of fit. Fortunately his suckers held.

"We must get him up somehow. Can we move him foot by foot?" shouted Mehhtumm. He felt curiously carefree and regarded the crisis as an interesting abstract problem.

"I'm not going up!" snarled Ghuddup.

"You can't go down and you can't stay here. Our only chance is to try and get him up bit by bit. Maybe he'll come to or faint, and we can manage him that way."

"I'm not losing our only chance of seeing what's below," snarled Ghuddup again. "The hell with 'Ossnaal, and the

hell with you too. You're yellow, that's what you are, a yellow skunk, a yellow Paisley skunk!"

Mehhtumm, in a dream, saw Ghuddup, who occupied a central position, saw quickly with a knife through the ropes on his either side. The long ends flailed down. 'Ossnaal's twitching body hung from three suckers of his four. Ghuddup spidered nimbly down and was soon virtually out of sight, but his muttered obscenities could be heard in Mehhtumm's radio. Mehhtumm tried to collect his thoughts, still dream-like. Finally he arrived at the conclusion that he must go for help, as he could certainly not manoeuvre the sick man by himself, and together they would probably perish uselessly. He pushed 'Ossnaal's left hand hard against the rock to fasten the sucker, tested the other three and shifted one. There was nothing to belay to. Extracting a luminous-dye marker from a pocket, he splashed the dye vividly over 'Ossnaal's suit and around him. He waited close to 'Ossnaal for two minutes, trying to arouse him by shouting his name. Finally the man quietened, and muttered something in response to Mehhtumm's shouts of "hang on ; don't move!"

Mehhtumm began clambering upward, marking the rocks with the dye-splasher. Half a minute afterwards a sound and a movement beneath caught his attention, and he looked down in time to see the body of 'Ossnaal plummeting into the abyss. An invisible Ghuddup was still muttering in Mehhtumm's radio, and it was half an hour before his voice faded.

The rest of the upward journey was a nightmare, and took Mehhtumm far longer than he expected. After about three hours his head began to clear as his body reverted to normal, and the full realisation of what had happened came to him. The first terrible doubts of his own action flooded in. There was nothing to be done now but to make as good speed as he could to the camp.

He had been calling for an hour before he was heard on their radios. Kettass sent Laafif and 'Afpeng to collect him. They managed to rendezvous by radio, and brought him back, weeping like a child, in darkness.

"Sounds like some sort of gas narcosis to me," Kettass said later to a recovered Mehhtumm.

"Yes, could even be nitrogen narcosis; except for 'Ossnaal. There could have been something else wrong with him—would you think?"

"I should never have let him go. He looked peculiar for some time. . . . We shall have to write off Ghuddup as well, poor fellow, if we can't trace him in the morning."

Next day in the early sunlight Mehhtumm, Laafif and Kettass went down unroped, and marked with dye. The oxygen apparatus of each was adjusted to give them a continuous supply as a high percentage of their inspiration total. They followed Mehhtumm's markings. It was agreed that the first man to notice any specially alarming symptoms, or to have any detected by the others, was to climb up at once, but that till then they would keep close together, and that the remaining two must come up together as soon as either began to succumb. What happened was that Laafif, becoming confused despite the oxygen about 100 metres above the fatal spot, started to ascend. Mehhtumm passed the spot and, despite a persistent impression that he had become a waterfall, silently climbed on down, passing Kettass rapidly. He was 400 metres below, muttering to himself and glaring about him, when he and Kettass heard something between a sob and a laugh in their radios, and Laafif's body passed them, a few feet out, turning over and over. It became a speck above the carpet of coiling vapour which had replaced yesterday's colour pattern. The cries were still sounding in their radios minutes later when reception faded.

Kettass, dimly retaining a hold on sanity, eventually persuaded Mehhtumm to return, convincing himself and the other through a swirl of sensations, that it would be no use searching for yesterday's madman over several thousand vertical metres of rock. Mehhtumm said later that at that depth he had kept on seeing little images of Ghuddup, brandishing a yellow knife, hovering around him.

They got back in the late afternoon, and next day a silent expedition set off for home, one man per vehicle.

It took five years for authority to build two suitable VTOL craft capable of flying and taking off efficiently in

both normal and high-pressure air, and fully pressurised within. Mehhtumm was dead, killed in a climbing accident on Mohgaritse, but Kettass secured a passage as film-taker and world radio-commentator on one craft, and Niizmek on the other. The broadcasts were relayed from a ground station set up on the plateau, which picked them up, or rather down, from the ionised reflecting layer of the atmosphere, since the basin depth would cut off direct craft-to-layer-to-receiver broadcasting; even so, only about a quarter of the material came through.

The two craft landed in summer on the plateau near the 15° slant zone. Flight between about 11 a.m. and midnight was considered meteorologically impossible owing to the severe up currents and the electrical disturbances. They took off at 7 a.m. just before dawn, using powerful searchlights. Kettass' craft, piloted by an impassive veteran of thirty named Levaan, was to sink down past the rock wall near the original descent. The other craft sped west looking for a change in the geography. The two were in continuous communication through the pilots' radios (on a different wavelength).

Levaan tried his radar on the invisible floor of the basin. "You won't believe this—we have 43 kilometres beneath us."

Kettass was speechless.

"There's a secondary echo at 37 km or so—could be the cloud layer below. Let me try the lidar." He aimed the unwieldy laser "gun" downwards. "Yes, that'll be the cloud layer all right. And that blip over there, that's the roller cloud, or rather an incipent roll—I don't think there's anything visible to the eye."

"The—the ground echo: what does that make it in depth?"

"Given our altitude above MSL that makes the basin floor over 41 km. below sea, and nearly 42 beneath the level of the plateau."

They began to descend. All trace of the event of five years ago was lost. The craft sank nine or ten kilometres, as indicated through the vertical radar. Kettass informed the world that the tinted rock was continuing and took a few film sequences. The sun poured across over the impos-

sible vertical face. At fifteen kilometres down the colours had broken up into isolated dots and patches. The empty parts of the sky had turned a milky white, now began to change to brazen yellow. There was still no visible sign of a bottom, none of the patternless pattern described by Mehhtumm, but the fog below was brilliant in sunlight, yellow sunlight. Even in the air-conditioned cabin it was exceptionally hot wherever the sun struck.

"Perspective makes the wall appear to curve in above us and below us," Kettass was saying to his microphone. The view was indeed rather like that seen by a midge dancing a few inches in front of a wall made of barrel-staves curving towards him, except that the "midge" would have been no thicker than a fine hair. The sky met the cliff line dizzyingly far overhead. No less than three parallel lines of black roller-cloud (very slender) were now silhouetted against the yellow sky, while a fourth roll was indicated by an Indian file of fish-like silhouettes alongside them. Not very far beyond hung the shaggy charcoal bases of the first cumuloids, behind which the brassy sun beat down. Black ghosts of the clouds grew and gestured, many kilometres high, on the cliff wall. At times Kettass had the illusion that the craft was flying banked sideways, and that the cliff wall was the horizontal floor of the world.

Descent began to be very bumpy. The other craft reported no change at 50 km west. At 36 km down the open sky was now a blood-orange hue. The fog, which had become exceedingly turbulent, was close below, and after cautious exploration Levaan found a hole through which pink, green and indigo masses could be dimly seen, crawling in the quivering air-currents. At 38 km down, battling against strong updraughts, they sighted far below a vast vista of dully red-hot lava, cold greenish lava, and what looked like violet mud, in apparently kilometres-wide slabs and pools, lapping right up against the thirty-to-forty-km high vertical wall on one side, and ending in pitch darkness many kilometres southward. Occasional flashes of forked lightning played near the cliff base. Besides the distortions of the air-currents, the whole floor was in slow motion, spreading, rocking, welling, bubbling.

Levaan broke in on Kettass' commentary to say he dared

not stay longer, as the updraughts were becoming too violent and the fabric was groaning. The other craft had just sighted the end of the basin and wished to make its own commentary. Risking a breakup in the turbulence near the roller cloud level, Levaan's craft rose to pass it, and swung back to rendezvous. Niizmek and his pilot Fehos had sighted a step-like formation closing in the western end.

Next morning the two craft switched roles. Fehos and Niizmek descended into the pit, some way out from the wall, while Levaan's craft flew east to find how the basin ended on that side. But Fehos' transpex imploded at 39 km down with a crack heard on the radios of the world and the craft, a squashed insect, plunged into the magma. After that Levaan would not fly his craft below 25 km down.

They established that the cliff line stretched 163 km east to west, or rather slightly north of east to slightly south of west, and that the western end, later known as the "Terraces," consisted of a series of nearly vertical cliffs of from 2,000 metres to 3,000 metres high each, separated by sloping shelves and screes several km across. The eastern end, the "Staircase" or "Jacob's Ladder," proved to be a rather similar formation like a comb or grid whose prongs or bars were 500-metre-high 30°-lean overhangs (over the basin) of hard rock, alternating with boulder-and-gravel-filled hollows of soft rock, the whole system being tilted down southwards at an angle of 35°. The southern edge was a vertical wall like the northern, nearly parallel to it, but peak-bordered, higher by several thousand metres, 146 km long, and some 200 km away. After a few months press and radio exhausted their superlatives and wisecracks ("Nature's Mohole" was the type) and took up "Slingo," a new parachute waltzing craze sweeping the world.

Thirty years later Kettass, a hale septuagenarian, was taken down the "Terraces" pressurised cable railway by his son-in-law, daughter, and three grandchildren, and, looking through the triple transpex wall, gazed in silence upon the oozing magma from 700 metres' range. He did not live to travel the tourist rocket route built five deaths and 83 strikes later down "Jacob's Ladder," but two of

his granddaughters took their families down the North Wall lift. That was the year Lebhass and Tollhirn made their fatal glider attempt. By this time, three other deaths and 456 strikes later, heat mills, for the most part automatically controlled and inspected, were converting a considerable fraction of the thermal energy in the basin to supply two continents with light, heat and power. A quarter of the northern plateau was given over to their plant, another quarter contained a sanatorium and reserve for hardy tourists, and the other half was a game reserve and ecological study area, but the jagged mountains of the south, scoured by their own murderous southerly winds, resisted general exploitation.

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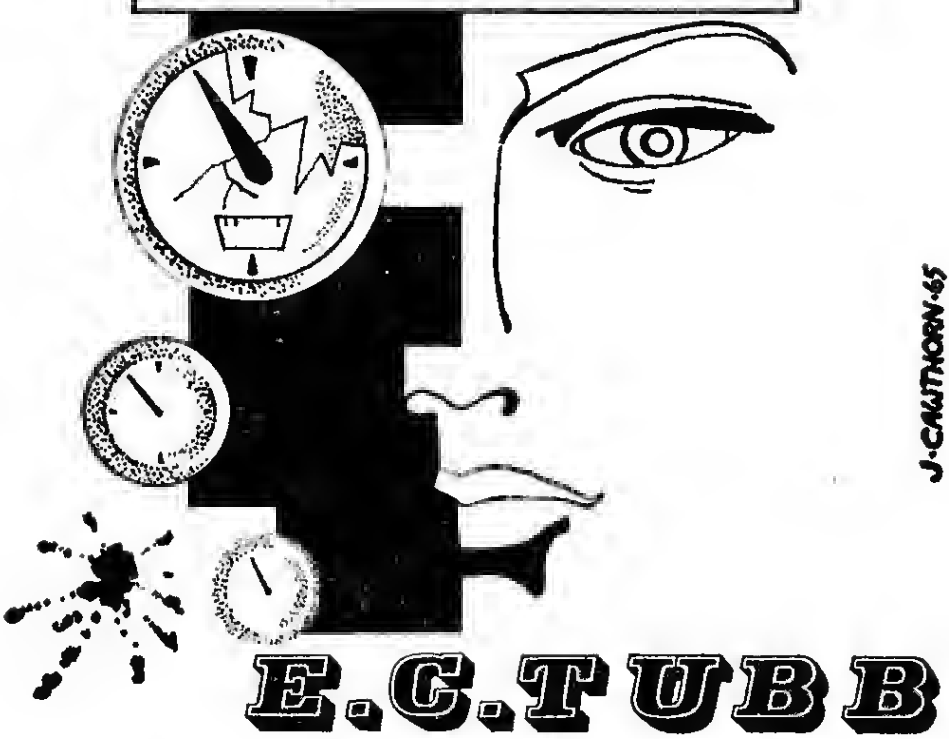
THE BEST OF NEW WORLDS

Edited and with an introduction by

MICHAEL MOORCOCK

and the stories date from 1958 to 1965. Seven years of Britain's leading sf magazine, from which we have selected the very best. Price 5s. from your newsagent or 5s. 6d. direct from Compact Books, 42–44 Dock Street, London, E.1.

ANNE



E.C.TUBB

THERE IS A place where there is no hurt, no sorrow, no fear, no regret. There has always been such a place. Some call it Heaven.

One man found it.

He fled the Cygni battle in a broken ship splotched with corrosive blue fire, the main drive screaming like a woman in pain as it kicked him through space away from the beams, the fire, the expanding flowers of atomic disruption. He wasn't old—space fighter pilots are never old. He wasn't strong—he had no need of muscle. He was a scrap of soft, commanding jelly locked in the protective womb of his vessel.

His name was Argonne.

He had chosen it himself after much searching through old books of forgotten wars. He wasn't alone in this. All

his companions of that time had adopted the names of famous battles, driven by the notion that a thing takes on the attributes of its name. Earlier his type had chosen to wear the names of great heroes—later of noted weapons. All hoped to gain power and strength from their choice. Argonne had failed.

He was a coward. The Warriors of the Pentarch do not run. They are either victorious or dead and he was neither. He had fled the battle while he still had life, still had a ship responsive to his commands, still had an enemy large in his sights. He could have fought until his body and vessel joined the others in incandescent ruin but he had chosen to run.

He was still running.

He groaned as he lay on his couch before the controls breathing red-misted air which stank of burning and tasted of char. Beneath a ruby patina his face was a mask of pain—the numbing hypnotic techniques had failed when he needed them most. He was quite alone. The Hatachi beam which had pulped the lower part of his legs had caught his apprentice with undeflected force. The red mist in the air was his flesh and blood jarred to instant molecular disruption. The rest of him sprawled on his couch, naked bone flecked with red and grey, plastic clothing smeared with slime. He was amused. The skull bore a cheerful smile.

Argonne could not appreciate the humour. He frowned through his pain as he listened to the voice of the ship. Always before it had whispered with a soft, almost inaudible humming, a smooth, smug satisfaction. Not even when entering battle and the hum had deepened to a feral purr had it screamed as it did now. But never before had the ship been so badly hurt.

And neither had Argonne.

He sank his teeth into his lower lip, adding a small pain to the greater, concentrating on the cruel impact of his teeth in an effort to minimise the molten agony of his legs. He fumbled at the arm of his couch, pressed a familiar button, felt again the sick despair as the needle which should have brought oblivion failed to respond. Painfully he reached forward and wiped the instruments

of their ruby film. Sweat made temporary trails over his face as he read their message.

The ship needed help.

Argonne gripped the sides of his couch and tensed the muscles in shoulders, back and arms. He heaved and tasted fresh blood as he fought the pain from his legs. Twice more he tried before admitting defeat. Sagging he gave up the struggle. He wiped his face and looked at the red wetness on his palm. He choked on the misted air. He was careful not to look down at his legs.

"I'm sorry," he said to the ship. "I can't do it. I can't help you."

It wasn't because he didn't know how.

Broken, battered and bleeding as the ship was he could still have helped. He could have blown away the contaminated hull, sealed the control room, changed the air-filters, cut out the distorted power-drive and repaired the seared insulation. He could have healed the crippled vessel and given back its computer nominal control. He had been trained to do that and still retained his knowledge. But to use it he needed both dexterity and mobility. He still had dexterity. He had lost his mobility.

There was nothing he could do.

He was a failure as well as a coward.

The scream of the ship was a justified accusation. He blinked at the stinging of his eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said again. "I just can't help you. I'm crippled, I can't move. Please, you must understand."

Weakly he sagged back against the couch on which he lived and slept. He didn't blame the ship for screaming. It had reason to scream.

And so did he.

He couldn't remember the landing. He didn't know what star this planet circled or what slot had opened between dimensions to permit their entry but they must have landed for the screaming was gone, the air was clean and he was no longer lying before the controls.

He was lying on a bed of cloud beneath a roof of purple in a room simply but tastefully furnished with vaguely

familiar things. A bureau he had used at the Academy? The books he had once owned when young? A painting he had cut from a magazine? He frowned and looked down at himself. He wore a single garment caught over one shoulder, belted at the waist, ending just above his knees. He looked at his legs—they were whole.

He looked up and saw the woman standing at his side.

"You have been asleep," she said. "Now you are awake. I am glad that you are awake."

He didn't answer, trying again to recall the landing, but all he could remember was noise and confusion and a red mist of pain. He looked again at his legs.

"We repaired you," said the woman. "You are perfectly well now."

He moved his legs, lifting his knees, feeling the shift and tension of muscle.

"And my ship?"

"In capable hands. The damage was extensive and medication will take longer. You see the hull was—"

"I know the extent of the damage," he interrupted. "But it will be all right?"

"Yes. It will be perfectly all right."

Her voice was soft and musical. The touch of her hand on his arm as he rose was warm and gentle. He stood upright and her eyes were just below the level of his own. Her hair was blonde and swept about the lines of her slender throat. She wore a garment as simple as his own. Her figure was superb.

He felt that he knew her—had known her for a long, long time.

"Where are we?"

"A place," she said. "A safe place."

He nodded, no longer curious as to where he was. He stared into her eyes.

"What is your name?"

"Anne," she said.

"Ann—with an e?"

"Yes," she said. "With an e. How did you know?"

He had known as he knew the other things about her. As he sensed the warm protective comfort of her presence. As he knew that she was wholly, and utterly, his. How he

knew did not worry him. He seemed to have lost the capability of care.

They left the room. They did not walk or, at least, he had no remembrance of walking. One moment they were in the room with its vaguely familiar furnishings, the next they were standing beneath a summer sun in a garden bright with flowers. He was not surprised. Such mobility was simply the achievement of desire without the tedium of effort.

He halted before a bush which bore fruit and bud and flower—a miracle of botanical engineering which ensured that here there could be no seasons of birth and death and decay. Here it was always summer. And winter?

"There are places where there is always snow and ice," said Anne. She seemed able to read his thoughts. "The sun is warm but the snow does not melt. Shall we go there?"

They went and played in the snow and slid on ice and sported in a world which was all white and blue and crisp. They went to a shallow beach which sloped to a rolling sea and swam in the surf, chasing finny creatures of remarkable agility before returning to their discarded clothes. They went to where a forest covered soaring hills in brilliant greens and sombre browns and walked among giant trees while eating strange berries and succulent fruits.

Then they returned to the garden.

It was still midday, still warm, still as if they had never left. Time here did not move on a relentless path from cradle to grave. There was only the joy of a moment stretched to eternity.

And they were alone.

Quite alone.

"Talk to me," said Anne. She rested beside him on a mossy bank which fell to a tinkling stream. The scent of her was a perfume in his nostrils. Argonne stirred and looked thoughtfully into the water.

"What about?"

"Of yourself. Of your past. Of the things you once considered important."

"Of the Pentarch?" He turned and looked at her.

wondering a little, then dismissing the doubt. What could she do against the massed might of Earth?

"The Pentarch," he said slowly. "The Pentarch is the race of Man. The rule of five."

"Five what?"

"Five different categories of human beings—those who need metaphorical walls, those who must fight, those who must create, those who are content to build and those who can do nothing but lead. Five interrelated and integrated branches of the human race. Five fingers of the same hand." He lifted his own and flexed the fingers before closing them into a fist. "The Pentarch!"

"And?"

"And what?" He looked down at the glory of her hair. She smiled up into his eyes.

"And what were you?"

"A Warrior." He was curt with a sense of guilt.

"A fighter?" She frowned. "Someone who destroys?"

"Someone who destroys the enemies of Man," he corrected. He looked at his clenched fist then slowly opened it. "The Hatachi!"

He had never seen one of the strange 'other race' which had taken it on itself to defy the destiny of Man. They had always been flecks on a screen, the target for his missiles, the focus of his beams. They were the enemy and that was enough. They existed only to be destroyed.

He felt the sudden acceleration of his heart, the quickening pulse of his blood, the tension of his body as he thought about the Hatachi. Logic had nothing to do with it. He would have felt the same had he been a doctor fighting death and disease, a pest destroyer waging war on vermin. He was born to fight—what didn't really matter.

"Don't!" said Anne. "Don't look like that!"

He ignored the woman. There was something wrong with this place. He had accepted everything too readily, had taken it at its face valuation, but his nature could not be passive. He frowned, again trying to remember the landing, but it was useless. Noise and confusion and shapeless images and then the wakening. And the woman.

Only the woman?

He had seen no one else. He had been here—how long?

There was no way of telling. It was always midday, always summer. Always soft and warm and gentle. Time here did not exist.

And yet he was not content.

Something was missing.

He heard her scream and turned and saw it and felt himself grown suddenly calm. It was the enemy, it could be nothing else. The squat, amorphous shape did not belong in this place. Nothing so hideous could have belonged. It was a stranger, perhaps an arrival like himself or perhaps it had followed him, it didn't matter. It had to be destroyed.

Argonne rose to his feet and stepped towards it.

He was unarmed but the fact didn't disturb him. He advanced towards the enemy, nose crinkling at its stench of burning, the odour tasting like char. A tendril lashed at his lower legs the touch burning like acid. It screamed as it rushed to battle.

Argonne snarled his reply and extended his hands.

It was a peculiar struggle. The thing fought with fanatical strength but still he prevailed. He gripped something soft and tore at noisome flesh and heard the screaming through the sickening air. He lifted and swung the thing from the ground, hurling it towards the sun. It rose and fell and a rain of ruby droplets spumed from the pulped body and misted the air. Argonne felt wetness on his face.

"Darling!" Anne was with him. Somehow she stooped over him, her hair a golden curtain about his face. The droplets had stained the whiteness of her skin.

"Darling!"

Her arms held him very close. So close they constricted his breathing.

"Darling!"

Her lips offered themselves to his.

"Darling!"

And then, as he reached for her, her face changed. It grew stiff and cold and impersonal. Only the red patina remained the same.

He looked at the instrument panel of his ship.

He lay for a long while, not moving, feeling only the

numbing ache of tremendous loss. Around him the ship screamed its agony but muted now as if finally accepting the fact that nothing could be done. Or perhaps his hearing was at fault. It didn't matter.

Nothing mattered now.

Neither of them had any reason to hope.

His lower legs radiated pain and an icy burning reached to his hips. His skin glowed with fever. He was drowning in the blood-filled air. The instruments told him that the corrosive blue fire on the hull had almost eaten its way to his section of the ship. He could do nothing to help himself. He could do nothing to help the vessel.

But it had tried to help him.

He turned his head and looked at the dream-cap which had somehow fallen from its catch into position above his head. The cap which provided the essential paradoxical sleep during his times of rest. How had it fallen from its catch?

Vibration, perhaps? More vibration to switch it on and thus provide an avenue of escape from this living hell. The only avenue of escape. He wondered what had happened to break the circuit and shatter his dream.

"Thank you," he said to the ship. "You did your best. Thank you."

But he was not sorry that the ship had failed—that the dream-circuit had been broken. He would not have liked to lie in the safe, snug world of illusion when the ship had nothing of comfort. It is bad to die alone.

Argonne had lived a solitary, dedicated life and it was natural for him to have followed ancient custom. The personalising and naming of weapons is not new. He looked at the four letters mounted above the instrument panel.

"Anne," he murmured. "With an e."

The girl he had never had, the wife he would never get, the dream he would never know again. The ship he had tried to save by running from those who would hurt her.

Anne!

Who had shown him Heaven.

This time he did not try to blink away his tears. They belonged. For around him something beautiful was dying.

Special Feature

THEM AS CAN, DOES

John Brunner

SO YOU HAD an idea for a science fiction story.

So after considerable effort you got it down on paper.

So you mailed it to John W. Campbell and sat back to await the cheque, and no cheque came—just the MS, with a note on the rejection slip informing you of the existence of International Reply Coupons and intimating that if you want the next story returned you'd better enclose some.

So you chewed off an eighth of an inch of fingernail and sent it (the MS, not the piece of nail) to Michael Moorcock, and it came home again, and you sent it in desperation to a fanzine and it came back from there, too.

Well, without actually seeing the story you wrote (which, believe me, is typical of hundreds such), I can't put my finger on precise reasons. But I'm going to try and indicate some general faults, and leave it to you to figure out the particular applications in your case.

I collected my first rejection slip when I was about 13. I still get them more frequently than I'd like (which is never at all). Somewhere between the two poles of invariable rejection and hundred per cent sales lies a point at which you learn to do some editing of your own work—including, if need be, your own rejections—and once that turnover is reached, you stand a damned good chance of selling.

Here's a set of rather inaccurate signposts which may guide you towards a first sale, or more sales, or *something*.

First: some elementary things not to do, which I'd cheerfully leave out if it weren't for the fact that people *do* them. (Ask any editor.)

Don't submit an MS handwritten on old blotting paper. Mark Twain sabotaged handwritten MSS a long time ago; he was the first writer, as far as I know, to submit a story double-spaced on one side of plain white paper, and this is nowadays the irreducible minimum. You want the editor

to pay attention to you. Make his job easier by supplying a legible script with the fewest hand-corrections you can manage, and the chances of his actually reading it go up from near-zero to pretty damned good.

Further: don't display your ignorance of the field. From my own experience here's a splendid example of how to ensure that a story gets bounced. When I was about fourteen or fifteen, having read van Vogt's *Centaurus II*, it occurred to me that one of these multigeneration interstellar arks was liable to be overtaken on the way by superior vessels, and the unfortunate crew would reach their goal to discover it was already a human colony.

A great idea. And the story kept bouncing . . . and bouncing . . . because the plot had also occurred to (guess who?) van Vogt. I hadn't read his version, but any editor trying to keep abreast of the field was bound to assume I had.

This is not to say (a) that no one should attempt to write sf unless he's been reading it since AMAZING STORIES Vol. I No. 1, nor (b) that every single idea has to be immaculately original. Most of my own plots are second-stage derivatives of other people's suggestions.

What I am driving at is that you must know and be prepared to be judged by the highwater marks of previously published material. If you want to write a story about (to revert to a theme already instanced) a long-voyage ship with a multi-generation crew, you *must* have some acquaintance with Bob Heinlein's *Universe*. If you want to write about robots, you must be prepared to find that Asimov got there first. If you want to write about a future dominated by overblown business corporations, you must be aware that Pohl and Kornbluth staked out a huge claim in the same area, and so on.

Let's assume, therefore, that you have a reasonable knowledge of the field, and you still think you've hit on a new twist to your theme, whether or not it's been used by someone else. (The first story I ever sold to ASTOUNDING stemmed from a single sentence in Cliff Simak's *Time Quarry*; much of the material in *Telepathist* derived from the key element of Peter Phillips's *Dreams are Sacred*. I mention this to

emphasise that figuring out a new twist is a perfectly adequate basis for actually writing a story.)

Now take stock of the plot you're considering. Begin asking yourself what *shape* it is. In other words: is it a capsule event, taking place in one, or at most a few, locations over a comparatively limited span of time? (This is a tricky question to settle in sf, because a story may last one day, narrational time, and one end might be in the Triassic and the other in the 25th Century . . . but never mind; the principle holds because it's a rule applicable to fiction generally, not to sf alone.)

In this case, you have a short story plot. You do not attempt to depict the rise and fall of whole civilisations, or describe a galactic empire in detail. You work out your background on scrap paper, choose some really important elements and slot them into the story unobtrusively, and beyond that forget it—except to ensure that your characters are behaving consistently with the setting you've given them.

Or, considering the other end of the scale: have you settled on an idea which must be acted out by more than one leading character, each involved in events which surround the main thread of the action and affect it by affecting the people who carry this action forward?

Then you're plotting a novelette or a novel, and you're going to have to spend a great deal more time thinking before you start writing.

This is a distinction which gets very blurred in contemporary fiction, but basically sf is structured in the old pulp tradition and hence refers to an old-fashioned narrative technique (a curious and rather saddening reflection on our "literature of the future"). So for the first few attempts at any rate stick by that rough guide, and take it as dogma that a short story should consist in a single event or a tightly connected series of events, the action being carried by as few named characters as possible, with about two or three of them being depicted in fairly substantial detail to engage the reader's attention.

I stress this because a major attraction of sf is its sense of impersonal forces at work, the gigantic panoramic screen it can encompass—given adequate space to work in.

But let's face it: neither you nor I should tackle an Olaf Stapledon-sized canvas . . . and for that reason you must fight shy of trying to cram the rise and fall of empires into three thousand words.

By this stage you should have mapped out in your mind the entire course your story will take, buttressing your memory with some notes—as it might be: "Open with sighting of inexplicable object adrift in ocean (establish protagonist as man who spots it first for economy's sake); why is ship there, who is protagonist, weather good or bad? Cut to occupant (?) of object as ship turns to pick it up. Hold back full description of object's nature to halfway point of story. Argument among crew develops as they inspect and try to open it. Three/four strange facts worry them. Payoff and explanations to end with; plant clues in middle of story to shorten ending and avoid anticlimax."

I did that off the top of my head. *I* don't know what the object was or who/what was in it. But I can think of lots of possibilities: maybe the ship is the *Golden Hind* and the object is a Martian saucer, or maybe the crew are illiterate Polynesian fishermen and the object is a re-entry vehicle in which the astronaut is slowly suffocating. I don't care. I'm only trying to illustrate one good rhythm for the story to follow: a hook right at the beginning, a mystery halfway through, a strong payoff as close to the last paragraph as the story-structure permits, and an argument among the crew as a means of sustaining the reader's interest meanwhile.

This leads me to the burning question of "characterisation." Doubtless you have read many reviews of sf books you thought were pretty damned good, where the critic declared the story was weakened by poor characterisation; very possibly you said to yourself, "What the hell does he *mean* by that?"

Let's clear up one too-facile preconception before we go any further. Characterisation does not simply mean creating "characters"—oddballs, eccentrics, way-out types—although there is no reason why it shouldn't embrace that. Jubal Harshaw, in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, counts as both kinds of character, and I think if you check up you'll see what I'm implying. (But Heinlein tends to rely too much

on the creation of grand eccentrics; when he's tackling a plot that doesn't provide opportunities for such people, the weaknesses of his method begin to show.)

It also does not mean building up a larger-than-life individual at the expense of the action. Nor does it mean introducing someone with a line of light banter and a stiff upper lip. For an object lesson in how to go disastrously wrong, inspect a story called *Expedition Mercy*, by J. A. Winter, M.D., in *Great Science Fiction about Doctors*. Here, the crew of a starship *en route* to a planet known to be hostile in some incredibly subtle fashion spend most of their time grinning at and ribbing each other like self-conscious schoolboys. Ask yourself if you'd expect adults to behave in the way Winter describes. A plot like his calls for a sense of impending doom; any laughter heard aboard that ship would be tinged with hysteria.

What characterisation does mean is showing off your actors in a light that (a) engages the reader's interest and (b) suggests that their reactions conform to a credible human pattern. Are the people stranded lightyears from home? They'll be scared, then; they'll be insecure. How does insecurity manifest itself? Argument and backbiting, trying to blame each other for the mess they're in. Factions will form, often for irrational reasons—if the group is mixed, a man may side with a pretty girl because he hopes to seduce her, not because he thinks she's talking sense. And so on.

Similarly: life is complicated and likely to go on being so. People display weakness, catch cold, grow bored, eat and drink, worry over trivialities, and cherish secret ambitions. The difference between a well-rounded fictional character and a cardboard puppet is essentially this: that the author has become personally acquainted with the former and chosen from his pseudo-human image a set of traits which outline him sharply in the reader's mind.

Word of warning: don't bog your action down in such personal traits, because it's as dangerous as laying on the background too thickly. A good writer will combine the two processes into one. He'll use the important details of the background to display the character. Example: take a world where automation has reduced the chance of getting

a job, and a protagonist who hates being a pensioner on society's National Assistance roster. *Don't* start by saying "X was miserable because since the twentieth century the world had . . ." Have him—say— lose his temper with a girl he wants to marry, and drive her away in a helpless fit of railing against the situation he finds himself in. See?

Dialogue is immensely important, and the commonest reason why beginning writers' sf stories are unreadable is lack of it. This lack of it, in turn, is ascribable to insufficient work on the characters. Puppets don't talk to each other, but it's almost impossible to stop real people doing so.

Where possible, use dialogue to get across background information essential to the plot. Don't lean over backwards, of course; don't have long lectures in quotation marks of which the substance is presumably already known to the listener. In fact, don't have long lectures anyhow. Break the key elements down into assimilable units and feed some of them in as dialogue, some as straight information and some as subjective reaction inside the leading character's mind. Like this. (Now let's see if I can actually *do* it!)

Yes, here's something. You're writing about a breakdown in a giant computer on which depends the survival of the human colonists on Mudball. You tackle it this way:

> The instant Joe Bloggs entered the low-ceilinged computer hall, he felt a sense of doom. The inspection panels of the main output bank were open, and five people were peering into the works. That much he'd expected, even though the vidphone call which had brought him from his quarters hadn't mentioned accident or breakdown.
>
> But one of those people was the Planetary President himself.
>
> The general alarm hadn't sounded, that was for sure. What sort of disaster rated the personal attention of the President, yet had to be kept secret for fear of panic?
>
> As Joe approached, Mac Hooligan, computer chief of the colony, broke off what he was saying and strode to greet him.

"Joe, thank goodness you're here! CADILAC has gone crazy, and all we can get out of it is the poems of Edward Lear!"

"Have you checked the input landlines?" Joe demanded. "There was a report of metal-eaters migrating in this direction, and if they got at the cables—"

"Do you think we're fools?" blazed Sandra Pigswill, Mac's deputy. Joe guessed that she would have resisted the idea of calling on him for help until every other possibility was exhausted. She resented any interference by outsiders; her whole life was dedicated to the independence of Mudball.

"The fault's definitely in this building," Mac confirmed hastily, afraid of a time-wasting argument. Joe's heart sank. He knew Mac too well to question the assertion.

"But—but the meteorological section warned us this morning that we could expect the stormy season to break ahead of schedule!"

No one bothered to answer.

And why should they? Joe asked himself as he stared sickly at CADILAC. *There can't be anyone on Mudball barring babes in arms who doesn't know what it would mean to face those gales without computers!*

That reads a bit like one of the "model passages" put out by the schools of authorship, I'm afraid, but I've fudged it up purely to emphasise that you don't begin this kind of story by saying: "After the third world war Earth was pacified and in 2167 Sebastian Quodge invented a star-drive and thousands of people were lost in the early emigrations but some planets were colonised after a terrible struggle and everybody was given free algae-bread and became atheists and only computers could deal with such dangerous alien animals as the energy-beasts of Arcturus and one day on Mudball the eleventh planet of Algol a guy called Joe Bloggs who hadn't been there long and only emigrated because his girl threw him over back in Des Moines . . ."

If the loss of the early starships matters to your plot, introduce someone who was saved from a wreck and suffers nightmares about his experience; if free algae-bread

is important, have someone grouse about it at mealtime—and so on.

In other words: integrate what the reader has to know into what the people in the story are concerned about.

One final word. Writing, like a good many other human activities including cookery and sex, contains incommunicable elements which you can only learn by doing it. It's one, however, where it's readily feasible to learn by other people's mistakes. (Cheaper and quicker than making your own!)

By this, I mean that what appears on the printed page for you to read is susceptible of being analysed and argued about. Try this illuminating exercise. Take a fresh look at a story you didn't like, but someone else presumably did: a reputable anthologist like Judith Merril, or the editor of a leading magazine. Ask yourself whether (a) you simply didn't see the point the author was driving at, or (b) you honestly could have improved on the way it was handled, by making the plot clearer, or more logical, or on a technical level by applying one of the general principles indicated above and redistributing the proportion of dialogue to background information, or in some other definable way.

If the answer is (a), you may either have picked a story which essentially didn't say very much, or you may have hit on one which really is a *tour de force*. In NEW WORLDS 152 James Colvin made what seems to me a patronising comment on Blish's *Common Time*. I think that's one of the most tremendous sf stories ever printed; I've read it half a dozen times and each time I've found another level in it. Save the analysis of a technique like that for much, much later—the chances are that it's so individual you can't profit by its example.

But if the answer is (b), you're on the way to acquiring an insight into how a story is put together, and the only thing left for you to do is demonstrate that the lesson has sunk in.

(© John Brunner, 1965)

(Letters on the subject of Mr. Brunner's article will be welcome).

THOT PROVOKING BELLY LAFFS



James Colvin

TO PRAISE A book as being vulgar might seem a bit peculiar to some, but that's one of the superlatives that hasn't yet been applied to *Bill, the Galactic Hero* (Gollancz, 16s.). If you didn't have the pleasure of reading the serial in recent issues of NEW WORLDS, it might be enough to tell you that running it did wonders for the magazine's subscription list. *Bill* is a wonderfully vulgar sprawling take-off on the space-opera—particularly on *Starship Troopers* and the Asimov *Foundation* set. It has been influenced by *Catch-22* and it's hard to think of a better influence for this kind of novel. There have been lots of anti-war novels, but the best are the least earnest. There isn't a hint of earnestness in *Bill*—and there is just a sufficient hint of seriousness to give it strength. Harry Harrison's hero begins as a simple country lad, is press-ganged (far-future-style) into the Empire Space Corps and, after a tough training, gets involved in a galactic war, wins the Purple Dart, goes to Helior, the Imperial Planet, to pick it up, becomes involved in a revolution (reminiscent, though obviously not derived from, *The Man Who Was Thursday*), gets court-martialled, and finally beats the Army and learns to live with it at the same time. Not exactly a happy ending. Though Harrison thinks of himself as a European, this is a pure American novel, in the rough, slapstick, unpretentious traditions of Mack Sennett, the Marx Brothers and MAD MAGAZINE at their best.

Michael Moorcock's *The Fireclown* (Compact, 3s. 6d.) was written two or three years ago, I believe; around the time he was writing *The Sundered Worlds* and his Elric stories, yet it is untypical of this period. The first few pages, describing the Fireclown himself in his underground

cavern, addressing a Hugo-esque rabble, are written in his familiar style, but then the writing becomes rather dull and both plot and style (though there are one or two other colourful and original scenes scattered here and there) seem vaguely reminiscent of Disraeli's *Coningsby*. This is a futuristic political novel in which a near-Utopian Earth finds itself clashing with the Fireclown, a mysterious, apocalyptic figure, a prophet of doom who accuses the world's population of 'renouncing Nature' in favour of an artificial way of life. For Moorcock it is in a minor key ; the plot is very conventionally constructed (in terms of the mainstream novel) and it is by no means as ambitious as his other work.

Rulers of Men (Pyramid Books, 50c.) is a collection edited and with an excellent introduction by Hans Stefan Santesson who once edited that individualistic magazine FANTASTIC UNIVERSE. Most of the stories—on the theme of how men will be governed in the future—will be familiar to long-time readers of the genre. Robert Bloch's *A Way of Life* is a rather *in*-group story about how hard-core sf 'fandom' comes to power. I felt that a fan magazine should have run it, but perhaps I'm being a bit stern. *Be of Good Cheer*, by Fritz Leiber is an ironic little piece about the end of the world and the bureauerat responsible for officially tidying things up just before it happens. Arthur Clarke's *This Earth of Majesty* is a peculiar piece of apparent wish-fulfilment about Prince Henry IX of England going on a space tour. I couldn't find a point that seemed credible. The rest of the stories are nearly all in a rather light vein and include *A Thing of Custom* by de Camp, *Prison Break* by Miriam Allen de Ford, *The Eyes Have It* by Randal Garrett, *Murderer's Chain* by Wenzell Brown, *Fall of Knight* by Bertram Chandler, *The K-Factor* by Harry Harrison and *The Wolfram Hunters* by Edward D. Hoch. A memorable and readable collection with the same distinctive and attractive atmosphere that FANTASTIC UNIVERSE used to have. Winey—mellow—quite clever. Not 'thot-provoking', particularly, but not intrusive, either.

A Century of Great Short Science Fiction Novels, edited by Damon Knight (Gollancz, 21s.) contains two that you have probably got or read—*The Invisible Man* by

Wells and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Stevenson—but both are well worth re-reading. Even today, they are infinitely better than most of the stories which succeeded them. I found myself reading them with absolute pleasure and interest. It seems a shame that Knight edited Capek's *The Absolute At Large* (not a task I would take upon myself). Capek's ironic, Middle European humour is in full flight here in a satirical story about an atomic machine that begins to manufacture 'the Absolute' and turns anyone who comes in contact with it into a religious maniac. Heinlein's *Gulf* hasn't the sense of conviction one receives from the preceding writers, but it is good commercial sf and fluently written, about the first superman and what it means to be a superman in a world of ordinary people. A bit tedious, after a while. If, as the book claims, Heinlein has exerted a revolutionary influence on the field, I don't know quite what it is, but if it's what I think it might be I don't think it's fair just to blame Heinlein. T. L. Sherred's *E for Effort* has a good mood to it, with some of the pure flavour of a good Wellsian moral tale about a machine that can look into the past and future. It is well-written, though its message might seem a little dated to some. A piece of true science fiction comes from Richard McKenna in his much-praised *Hunter, Come Home*. The science—anthropology, biochemistry and ecology—is sound, but so is the mood of this story. Save for a few minor quibbles about rather cardboard characters, I must admit that this story of settlers on a strange, alien planet, is one of the best I've read in contemporary American science fiction. The book is excellent value for 21s. and I can recommend it, in spite of the eye-wearying small type which makes it (not the stories in it) an effort to read. Gollancz seem to be improving, judging by the above pair, but they'll have to make a big effort this year to make up for all the bad, bad books they published last year.

A little too late for a proper review in this column is *New Writings in SF 6* (ed. John Carnell, published by Dobson, 16s.). It has a long novelette by Keith Roberts that looks like one of his best. Other stories by E. C. Tubb, John Rackham and William Spencer indicate that NWISF 6 is the best of this series yet.

James Colvin

All correspondence to
The Editor,
NEW WORLDS SF,
87a Ladbroke Grove,
London, W.11



As much general interest as possible

Dear Sir,

By all means, it would be a good idea to increase the size of NEW WORLDS, and the price—most people are agreeable on that score. But the point is this: *Must* we resort to the publication of short novels (you hint at this in editorial 152)? I can go out and buy a long novel any day of the week, and still buy NEW WORLDS because of its present, relieving diverseness *from* the novel. After all NEW WORLDS *is* a magazine, and in my opinion a magazine should aim towards a general scattering of as much general interest as possible; which brings me to another point—as has been suggested before, if NEW WORLDS is to expand as it *will*, every form of art should be expressed within its pages. This will bring sf up to an extremely fine and varied art, which indeed it is already, but somewhat limitedly, I feel. If a writer has the ability to set his sf down in black and white but in the guise of a poem or a sketch, then his ability *must* be recognised.

The tale, as opposed to the story, is gaining popularity. This is because our civilisation is rapidly approaching a second Romantic Age. Definitely the tale can offer the most to sf out of all arts. The tale will also satisfy those readers who seem to be hungering after novels, offering a *uniform whole*.

The tale has dominated the literature of the past (even in its novel form). It will also dominate the literature of the future, I feel confident. Thanks for a good magazine.

Michael D. M. Butterworth, 10 Charter Road, Altrincham, Cheshire.

Death Dealing

Dear Sir,

It's curious, that out of the six stories in NW 152 (discounting Richardson's piece) four deal with death, either the death of one man, or the death of the planet and the race. Thinking back, it also appears to have been a not uncommon theme in NEW WORLDS in the recent past, and I wonder why this should be so. Certainly, it's an important subject, but is it any more important than other facets of human life . . . treachery, courage, love, hope? Obviously, there's no reason why an author should not choose to set his story upon a dying planet, or amidst a dying humanity, or After The Bomb, and equally obviously, such stories can be just as enjoyable as any other, but exactly why should writers be drawn towards this particular motif at the moment?

It could be that the new writers are simply fatalistic in their outlook; they don't descend to cheap moralising anyway, it seems more like the shrugging acceptance of history that one might find among overburdened peasants. An arguable philosophy at any rate. Or maybe it's a reaction against the open-eyed optimism which used to be prevalent in sf, the Terrans-are-Superior-to-Anyone type of stories. Again, it might be thought that such stories, merely by using this sort of sombre theme, are necessarily more serious and carry more weight than normally, perhaps thereby leading to greater consideration than is usually given to such escapist stuff as science fiction. If the latter is the case, I don't personally feel that "escapism" is such a dirty word, nor do I think that such devices are likely to bring about the longed-for mainstream recognition which George Collyn expresses, like a lonely flat-earther.

Whatever the case, and if I felt like being flippant, I would suggest that, as ANALOG is the engineers' sf magazine, then NEW WORLDS is the undertakers' magazine. But I won't be flippant. However although I don't object to these stories as such, I do think that NEW WORLDS has been giving us rather *too* much of them of late.

What else was there? Yes, the price increase: needless to say, I would not object to such a thing, but then I wouldn't particularly object to doubling the price. . . . I'm

hooked. The point is, obviously, what it would do to your circulation, which is something you and your publishers are no doubt pondering. More pages in NW would be very welcome, although it beats me how you cram so much into the pages you have . . . another reason why I shrink from letters of comment, there's too much to comment upon.

There are things in NEW WORLDS that I don't agree with, or don't like, but it is the only magazine at the moment which is trying to revive sf, the old crusade that F & SF and GALAXY waged in the past, with varying success, and therefore, you have my best wishes, and those of everyone else who cares for the medium at all. I would only ask that the task wasn't carried out quite so seriously.

One more thing, I must put in a belated cry of delight over B. J. Bayley's story in 151. Wonderful! Twist his arm, and get some more for us, his first was brilliant too.

Ivor Latto, 16 Merryton Avenue, Glasgow, W.5.

The first larger issue will be out soon, we hope.

We promise to try not to get such a strong emphasis on death in this one. We hope to have a new Bayley story quite soon, also.

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IN THIS ISSUE

NEW WORLDS



1966

should be a year of accomplishment in science and the arts. Where the two fields fuse spectacularly is in the area of literature called science fiction—and this will certainly be a year of accomplishment in sf.

For this special New Year issue, we present a varied selection of modern stories which indicate some of the directions in which sf will develop in the next twelve months and after. What they have in common is their richness of imagery, strength of conviction and ability to entertain at many levels

Peter Redgrove's new poem
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